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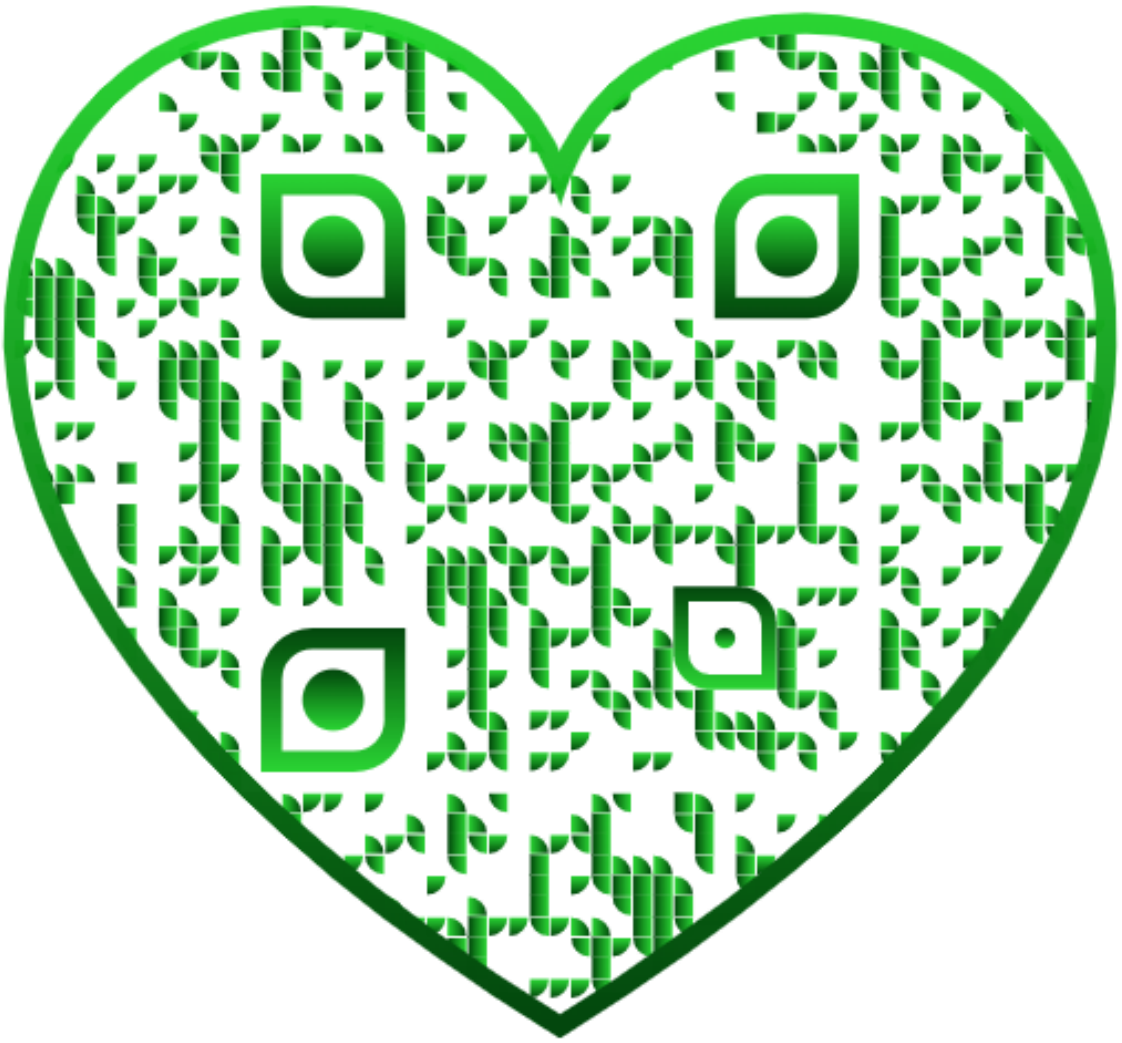

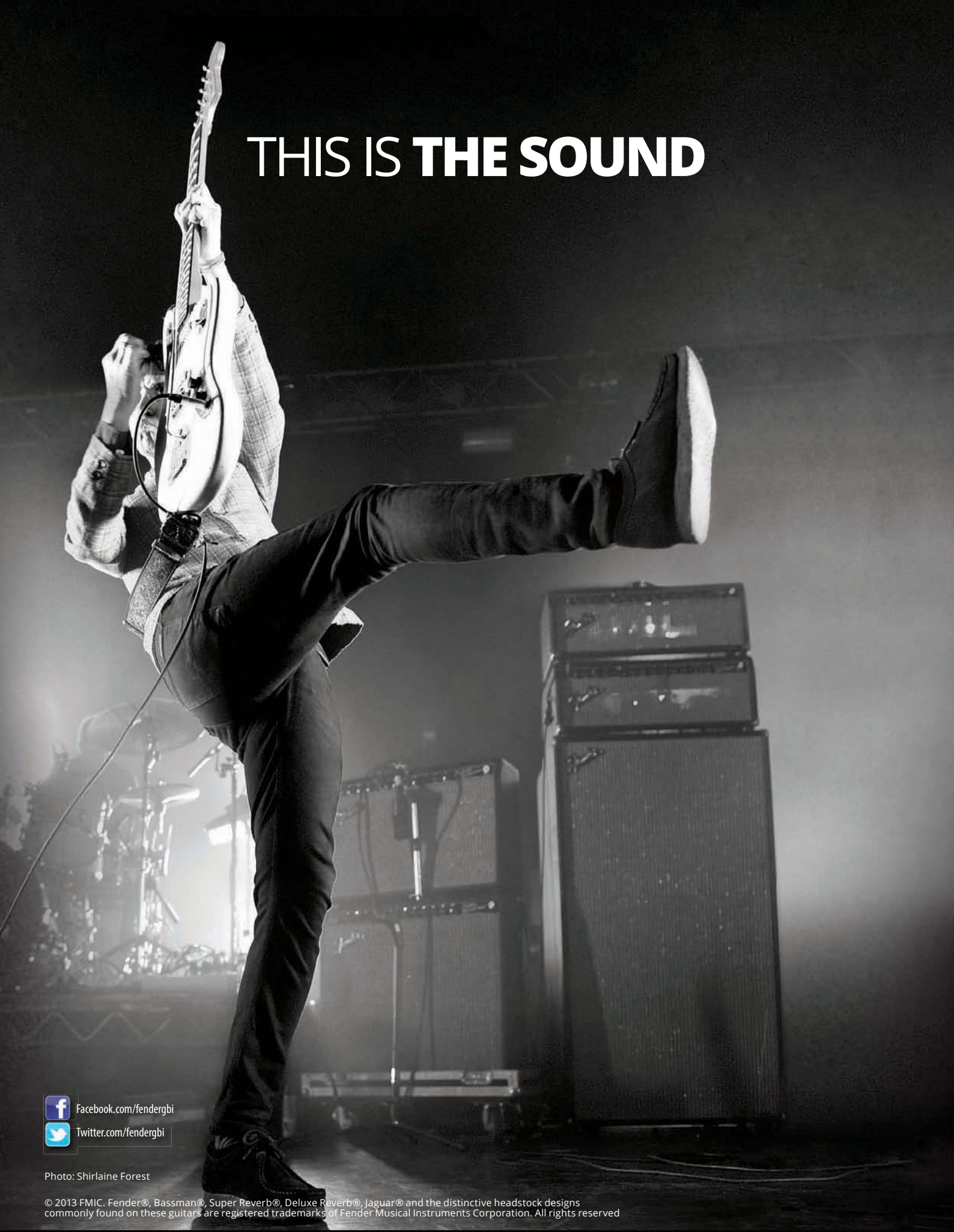

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MARCH 23, 2013
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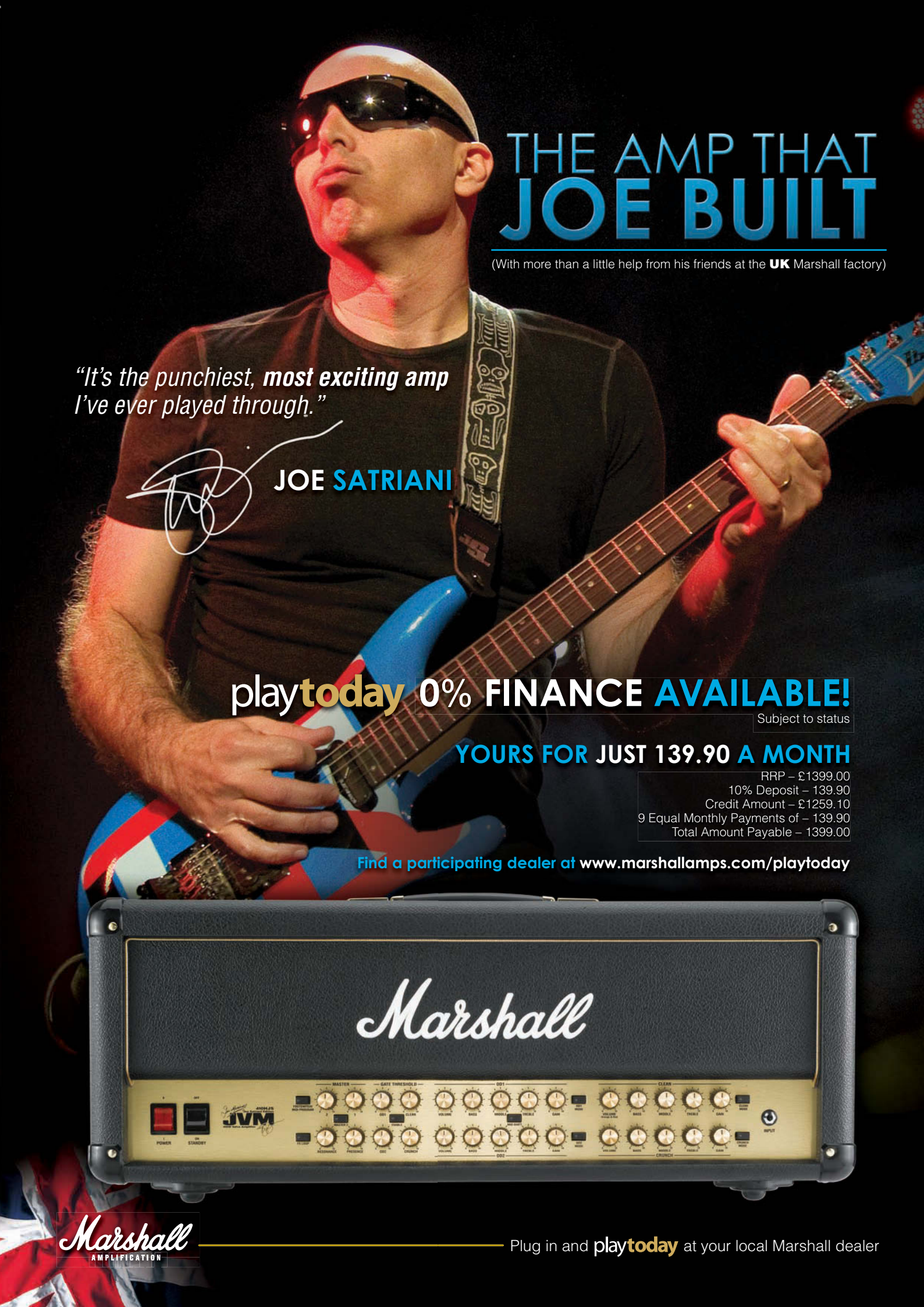
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Electric Guitars

8030 - 1963 Gibson ES175 Jazz Guitar, Sunburst
10067 - Brian May Bass in Cherry with Gig Bag
10066 - Brian May Red Special, Antique Cherry
10055 - Brian May Red Special, Metal May
7028 - Brian May Red Special, Antique Cherry
10065 - Brian May Red Special, Baby Blue
10061 - Brian May Red Special, Black
10063 - Brian May Red Special, Gold
10064 - Brian May Red Special, Green
10059 - Brian May Red Special, Honey Sunburst
10058 - Brian May Red Special, Natural
10057 - Brian May Red Special, Sunburst
10062 - Brian May Red Special, White
10060 - Brian May Red Special, Windermere Blue
10069 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Black
10068 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Cherry
10071 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Red
10070 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Sunburst
10231 - Brooks Custom Steve, Lukather Clone
9767 - Cort G260 Electric Guitar
10224 - Cort M600 AVD Antique Violin Dark
10220 - Cort Sunset I in Black
10223 - Cort X6 S-M BK Electric Guitar in Black
7793 - DBZ Barchetta Eminent FR Absinthe
7785 - DBZ Barchetta ST, Aubergine
7789 - DBZ Barchetta ST FR, Cobalt Blue
7814 - DBZ Crucifixion Electric Guitar
7810 - DBZ Dark Angel Electric Guitar
7812 - DBZ Bare Bones Religion Series Devil
7811 - DBZ Bare Bones Religion Series Preacher
7800 - DBZ Bolero AB, Solid Wine Red
7796 - DBZ Bolero FM, Trans Wine
7794 - DBZ Bolero ST, Black
7837 - DBZ Venom, Dark Blue Metallic
9770 - Dean Evo, Pre-Owned
5043 - Duesenberg 49er Cow Limited Edition
5040 - Duesenberg Rocket II in Black & White
10233 - ESP LTD MH50, Black, Pre-Owned
9769 - Encore Electric Guitar, Black
5205 - Epiphone Broadway Jazz Semi, Natural
8220 - Epiphone ES339 Semi Hollowbody, Ebony
9155 - Epiphone ES339, Natural
8528 - Epiphone ES339 Ultra, Vintage Sunburst
5432 - Epiphone G310 SG Shape, White
9631 - Epiphone Joe Pass Emperor II, Natural
9695 - Epiphone Les Paul Special II Cherryburst
9905 - Epiphone LP Stan Plustop Pro, Cherry S/B
10351 - Epiphone LP Stand. Plustop Pro, Wine Red
8365 - Epiphone Les Paul Standard in Gold
10352 - Epiphone Les Paul Standard, Ebony
10217 - Epiphone Les Paul Studio, Sunburst, S/H
9604 - Epiphone Les Paul Ultra III Alpine White
8096 - Epiphone Ltd Ed Flying V, Antique White
8165 - Epiphone Ltd Ed 1961 SG, Alpine White
9666 - Epiphone Phrophecy LP Custom Plus GX
8101 - Epiphone by Gibson, Pre-Owned
4231 - Fender Am Special Strat, Candy Apple Red
9074 - Fender American Special Strat, Sunburst
9914 - Fender Am. Special Tele, Vintage Blonde
9348 - Fender American Stan. Hand Stained Strat
10199 - Fender Am Stand. Strat LH, Sburst
9910 - Fender Am Standard Strat, Mystic Blue
8342 - Fender Am Standard Strat, Sienna Sburst
9134 - Fender American Stratocaster Daphne Blue
9023 - Fender American Vintage '70s Strat Reissue, Nat
9287 - Fender Blacktop Stratocaster HH, Black
10072 - Fender Classic Player Baja Telecaster, Blonde
9261 - Fender C. Player Jaguar Spec HH, White
9559 - Fender Custom Shop 1960 Relic Strat, GR
7112 - Fender Deluxe Lonestar Strat, Sunburst
10163 - Fender FSR 72 Telecaster Deluxe, Aqua Flake
10198 - Fender FSR Am Stan. Strat, LH, Sunburst
9085 - Fender FSR Strat HSS TBX Amber Burst
10218 - Fender Japanese Strat, CAR, Pre-Owned
4634 - Fender Jim Root Signature Strat, Black
9775 - Fender Johnny Marr Jaguar, Metallic KO
10164 - Fender Kurt Cobain Mustang, Sonic Blue
8113 - Fender Modern Player Available To Order
9945 - Fender Modern Player Strat HSS, O. White
8224 - Fender Modern Player Telecaster, Honey Burst
8286 - Fender Modern Player Tele Thinline Delux
7784 - Fender Mustang Pawn Shop Special, Red
9089 - Fender Pawn Shop 51 Stratocaster, Black
9090 - Fender Pawn Shop 51 Stratocaster, Blonde
10149 - Fender Pink Paisley Telecaster, Used
5287 - Fender Road Worn 50s Strat in Black
8290 - Fender Road Worn 60's Strat, Sunburst
4229 - Fender Road Worn Player Strat, Sunburst
4232 - Fender Road Worn Player Tele, Black
9449 - Fender Select Tele USA Violin Burst
10101 - Fender Standard Strat, CAR, Secondhand
7954 - Fender Standard Strat, Copper Met Burst
4560 - Fender Standard Telecaster, Black
4748 - Fender Standard Tele, Brown Sunburst
10090 - Fender Telebration Mahogany Tele, Sburst
9911 - Fender USA 75 Telebration, Natural
9507 - Fender USA Hardtail Stratocaster 1977
8285 - Fret King Jerry Donahue, Natural
9137 - G&L ASAT Classic Bluesboy Semi, Natural
9140 - G&L ASAT Classic in Walnut
9136 - G&L Legacy in Black
9135 - G&L S500 in Blueburst
9150 - Gibson ES137 Custom, Triburst
8029 - Gibson ES175 1956 Original
9277 - Gibson ES330 VOS, Vintage Sunburst
10146 - Gibson ES335 Dot Plain Gloss, Sunburst

Electric Guitars

10273 - Gibson ES339 Antique Sunburst
9840 - Gibson Lee Roy Parnell Goldtop
8376 - Gibson Les Paul Classic 60s Trans Ebony
5317 - Gibson Les Paul Custom in Alpine White
7919 - Gibson Les Paul Custom in Wine Red
10197 - Gibson Les Paul Signature T, Trans Ebony
9444 - Gibson Les Paul Standard 2012 Goldtop
10116 - Gibson Les Paul Std 2013 Prem. Tea Burst
10117 - Gibson Les Paul Std 2013 Premi. Trans Amber
10144 - Gibson LP St Premium Plus, Desert Burst
10322 - Gibson Les Paul Stand., Heritage Cherry
9341 - Gibson Les Paul Studio, Radiant Red
5090 - Gibson Les Paul Studio Lefty, Wine Red
9557 - Gibson Les Paul Studio, Vintage Sunburst
10281 - Gibson Les Paul Trad., Caramel Burst
8202 - Gibson Nighthawk. Pelham Blue
5594 - Gibson SG Special Electric Guitar in White
10350 - Gibson SG Special Faded Cherry
10268 - Gretsch G5422TDCG Hollow Body ,White
9771 - Ibanez S470DXQM
9764 - Italia Electric Guitar, Pre-Owned
9161 - Jackson RR5 Japanese Ivory Pinstripe
4992 - Jackson JS30 Randy Rhoads, Black
4150 - Jackson SL3MG Soloist, Natural
9669 - Jackson Super Light Soloist SLSXMG GMG
0000 - Levin - 7 models in stock now
8051 - Lodestone Electric Artist, Trans Black
8052 - Lodestone Electric Artist in Sunburst
8048 - Lodestone Electric Artist, Trans Honey
8049 - Lodestone Electric Artist, Trans Red
8059 - Lodestone Electric Pro S, Chignal Blue
8065 - Lodestone Electric Pro S, Rodings White
8058 - Lodestone Electric Pro S, Tobacco Sburst
8066 - Lodestone Electric Pro S in Waltham Black
8055 - Lodestone Electric Pro, Chignal Blue
8056 - Lodestone Electric Pro, Rodings White
8053 - Lodestone Electric Pro, Roxwell Red
8057 - Lodestone Electric Pro, St James Silver
8054 - Lodestone Electric Pro, Tobacco Sunburst
8072 - Lodestone Electric Standard S, T. Sburst
8070 - Lodestone Electric Standard Trans Black
8071 - Lodestone Electric Standard S, White
8069 - Lodestone Electric Standard in White
8085 - Lodestone Pulse in Burr Maple Honeyburst
8086 - Lodestone Pulse, Matt Black
8084 - Lodestone Pulse in Metallic Gold
8087 - Lodestone Pulse, Tobacco Sunburst
7091 - MusicMan Luke HSS, Pearl Blue
4720 - MusicMan Silhouette Special, Candy Red
0000 - PRS - 12 Models in stock now
6123 - Patrick Eggle Double Cutaway in Blue
6121 - Patrick Eggle RSG Electric Guitar, Amber
9478 - Peavey AT200 Antares AutoTune Guitar
9450 - Peavey EVH Wolfgang USA-Made Goldtop
9001 - Peavey Rockmaster Captain America
9300 - Peerless Martin Taylor Virtuoso
4268 - Rickenbacker 330 12 String Semi, Jetglo
6951 - Rickenbacker 360 Semi, Fireglo
6952 - Rickenbacker 360 Semi, Jetglo
4270 - Rickenbacker 360 Semi, Mapleglo
10165 - Road Worn Player Tele, Candy Apple Red
8992 - Roland G5 Strat COSM Technology Black
8993 - Roland G5 Strat COSM Technology Sunburst
9857 - Roland G5A Strat Candy Apple Red
8990 - Roland GC1 Black GK-Ready Stratocaster
8991 - Roland GC1 Sunburst GK-Ready Strat
0000 - Squier - 6 models in stock now
0000 - Stagg - 3 models in stock now
9273 - Steinberger Spirit GT Pro
10131 - Traveller Speedster, Blue, Pre-Owned
9079 - Ventures VM100SB Bob Bogle Sig, Sunburst
9078 - Ventures VM65MBL Electric Guitar, Blue
4256 - Vintage AV2, Sunburst
9420 - Vox Apache I
9652 - Warwick Electric Guitar Accessory Pack
6982 - Washburn USADD70Maya Dan Donegan, Grey
4757 - Washburn N1 Vintage Nuno Bettencourt Nat
7074 - Washburn SI61 Obey Scott Ian Sig, Black
6991 - Washburn USA Custom WI556, Metallic Red
6997 - Washburn V200 ProE in Black
7005 - Washburn WI100, Gunmetal Grey
7002 - Washburn WI100, Red
7009 - Washburn WI15 Idol Standard ,Black
8412 - Washburn WI18 Idol Quilted Trans Black
8411 - Washburn WI18 Idol Quilted Trans Red
7356 - Washburn WI420KB Idol, Black
8409 - Washburn WI-440F Idol Elect Flame Honey
8408 - Washburn WI-440F Idol Tobacco Sunburst
8406 - Washburn WI-460E Idol Electric, Black
8405 - Washburn WI-460E Idol Electric in White
6988 - Washburn WI50 in Black
6989 - Washburn WI50 Pro-E, Black
8404 - Washburn WI-63 SF Donegan Sig, Black
6995 - Washburn WV40VASIK Scott Ian Blood Splat
6996 - Washburn WV66ANC, Nick Catanese, Black
6898 - Washburn Wi14 Idol in Metallic Blue
6899 - Washburn Wi14 Idol in Wine Red
8230 - Washburn X10 Bass Guitar, Black
6895 - Washburn X100 in Metallic Grey
6900 - Washburn X200 Pro in Trans Black
6425 - Westcoast ST Junior in Black & Sunburst
6449 - Westcoast ST1 in Ivory, Red & Natural
8416 - Yamaha Pacifica 012 in Red Metallic
8414 - Yamaha Pacifica 012, Dark Blue Metallic
10234 - Yamaha Pacifica 012 in Black
8121 - Yamaha Pacifica 311H, Vintage White
8184 - Yamaha Pacifica 510V , Candy Apple Red
10319 - Yamaha Pacifica 611 VHFM
8124 - Yamaha Pacifica 611 Root Beer

Acoustic & Electro Acoustics

8033 - Breedlove AD25/SM
8035 - Breedlove AJ250/SF Plus Electro Acoustic
10296 - Breedlove Atlas Solo Series C350/CR
10284 - Breedlove Cascade C25/CRE Electro
10285 - Breedlove Cascade OM/CRe S Cutaway
10287 - Breedlove Passport C250/COe Electro
10288 - Breedlove Passport D/MMe Electro
10289 - Breedlove Passport D250SMe Electro
10299 - Breedlove Passport PLUS D/CME Electro
10292 - Breedlove Passport Plus C250/SBe Elect
7979 - Breedlove Passport Plus C250SFE
4282 - Breedlove Passport + D/SFE Elec Sunburst
10301 - Breedlove Passport Plus D250/SB Electro
10300 - Breedlove Passport Plus OM/CMe HH
10294 - Breedlove Retro D/ERe with LR Baggs
10295 - Breedlove Retro OM/ER Orchestra Electro
10298 - Breedlove Revival OM/SMe Top Burst
4283 - Breedlove Solo C35/Sme Electro, Natural
10069 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Black
10068 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Cherry
10071 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Red
10070 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Sunburst
10219 - Cort NDX50 Electro Acoustic Guitar, Nat
10221 - Cort SFX-E NS Electro, Natural Satin
10125 - DRL 008 8 String Electro Acoustic Guitar
10124 - DRL CT09 Thinline Electro Acoustic
4769 - EKO Ranger EQ Vintage Series, Black
8905 - Eko Ranger Vintage 12 String w/Fishman
9206 - Epiphone EJ200CE, Natural
5157 - Epiphone EJ200CE Jumbo Vintage SunB.
9542 - Faith FMETB Mercury Electro Parlour
9104 - Faith Saturn Cutaway High Gloss FSCEHG
8300 - Faith FECS Electro Acoustic Guitar
10320 - Fender CD60CE Mahogany
7881 - Fender Kingman SCE, Dreadnought, Nat
6929 - Fender Stratacoustic, Electro, Black
10194 - Fender T-Bucket 300CE, Amber
6930 - Fender Telecoustic, Electro, Black
10243 - Fender Tim Armstrong Deluxe
10106 - Fylde Alchemist Electro Acoustic
7867 - Gibson J200 Standard Electro in Natural
7032 - Gibson J200 Standard Jumbo Guitar
8241 - Gibson J200 Studio, Vintage Sunburst
10150 - Gibson J35 Electro Acoustic Guitar, Nat
10143 - Gibson LG2 American Eagle
10147 - Gibson SJ100 Modern Classic V.Sunburst
8091 - Jimmy Moon 0003CE Electro Acoustic
4555 - Jimmy Moon Bryan Adams Signature
4554 - Jimmy Moon PF0003 Electro, Pau Ferro
6948 - Jimmy Moon RD3, Electro, Natural
9552 - LAG T300AE Electro Acoustic Guitar
7302 - LAG T66ACE Auditorium Cutaway Electro
7972 - LAG T200ACE Auditorium Cutaway Electric
5403 - Levin LD60CE, Dreadnought Electro, Nat
9243 - James Neligan NA72CBB Electro Acoustic
0000 - Levin - 5 models in stock now
8277 - Martin DC15ME Dreadnought Cutaway
6404 - Northwood R70 00 14fret Electro, Natural
4400 - Northwood R80, 000V Electro, Natural
6403 - Northwood R80, 0M Electro, Natural
9841 - Ovation Adamas 1581-7 Electro Acoustic
5093 - Ovation CDX24 Electro Acoustic in Natural
10033 - Ovation Celebrity CC44S AB, Autumn
10031 - Ovation Pro Elite 2078AX
10032 - Ovation Pro Elite TX 1868TX Super
10151 - Ovation Pro Speciality 1773AX-4 Natural,
9299 - Peerless Martin Taylor Maestro
10095 - RainSong BI-JM1000N2 Graphite Guitar
10094 - Rainsong S-DR1000 Graphite Guitar
10038 - Rainsong S-DR1000 Graphite Guitar
9820 - Rainsong CO-DR1000N2
9821 - Rainsong CO-JM1000N2
9819 - Rainsong CO-OM1000N2
9818 - Rainsong CO-WS1000N2
9814 - Rainsong DR1000 Graphite Guitar
10097 - Rainsong H-DR1100N2
10100 - Rainsong H-OM1000N2
10098 - Rainsong H-WS1000N2
9815 - Rainsong JM1000 Graphite Guitar
4812 - RainSong OM1000
10082 - RainSong P12 Parlor
10084 - RainSong P12 Parlor in Blue
10086 - RainSong P12 Parlor in Green
10085 - RainSong P12 Parlor in Pewter
10087 - RainSong P12 Parlor in Red
10088 - RainSong P14 Parlor
10091 - RainSong P14 Parlor in Blue
10092 - RainSong P14 Parlor in Green
10093 - RainSong P14 Parlor in Pewter
10089 - RainSong P14 Parlor in Red
9824 - Rainsong S-DR1000N2 Dreadnought Std
9823 - Rainsong S-OM1000N2 OM Studio Electro
9822 - Rainsong S-WS1000N2 WS Studio Electro
9827 - RainSong SG Shorty Gloss Shorty Series
9828 - RainSong Shorty Fine Texture SFT Model
7974 - Rainsong WS1000 Graphite Guitar
5257 - Satori YD18EQ, Dreadnought Electro, Nat
5256 - Satori YD28EQ, Dreadnought Electro, Nat
5252 - Satori YD28HEQ, Dreadnought Electro, Nat
8234 - Satori YD42EQ Electro Acoustic
5255 - Satori YO28HEQ, OM Electro, Natural
9536 - Sigma 000MC 15E Electro Acoustic Guitar
10303 - Takamine EG340SC, Pre-Owned
0000 - Tanglewood - 17 models in stock now
10118 - Terry Pack PLSR Parlour w/Pre-Amp
9615 - Terry Pack SJRS Small Jumbo LR Baggs M1A
8007 - Vintage Gordon Giltrap Signature
9561 - Vintage VEC1400 Electro Acoustic
9535 - Walden CG570CE Electro Acoustic Guitar
8307 - Westcoast SW201BK -VT Acoustic Guitar
8305 - Westcoast SW201RDS VT Electro Acoustic
8306 - Westcoast SW201VT Acoustic Guitar
6960 - Yamaha CPX500 Electro in Red
9190 - Yamaha CPX700 Electro Dusk Sun Red
8020 - Yamaha CPX700, Tinted Finish
9191 - Yamaha FGX730SC Electro Acoustic, Nat.
9192 - Yamaha FJX730SC Electro Acoustic, Black
6965 - Yamaha FX370C Electro Acoustic in Nat.
8141 - Yamaha SLG110S Silent Steel String

Bass Guitars

8687 - Breedlove Passport Plus B350/CB4
10297 - Breedlove Solo BJ350/CMe4 Fretless Bass
10067 - Brian May Bass in Cherry with Gig Bag
4910 - Bridge Cetus Electric Double Bass
10108 - Cort A4 4 String Bass Guitar, Natural
10107 - Cort A4 Custom Z 4 String Bass Guitar
10109 - Cort A5 5 String Bass, Open Pore Natural
10105 - Cort A5 OPBC Bass Guitar
10110 - Cort B5 5 String Bass Guitar, OPN
10213 - Cort GB75WBL 5 String Bass, White Blonde
10242 - ESP LTD B204 SM, Natural, Pre-Owned
4882 - Fender USA 62 Vintage Precision Sunburst
10166 - Fender 75 Jazz Bass in Natural
9083 - Fender Am Special Jazz Bass, Sunburst
9353 - Fender Am St Hand Stained Ash Jazz Bass
9231 - Fender Am Standard Jazz Bass, Sunburst
7943 - Fender Am Stan Precision Bass, Sunburst
9727 - Fender FSR Precision, Sea Foam Metallic
8113 - Fender Modern Player Available To Order
9367 - Fender Select Jazz Bass, Amber Burst
9284 - Fender Standard Jazz Bass, Arctic White
8287 - Fender Standard Jazz Bass, Brown S.burst
9909 - Fender Standard P Bass, Lake Placid Blue
10113 - G & L M2000 4 String Bass Guitar, Honeyburst
10112 - G & L M2500 5 String Bass, Honeyburst
9703 - G & L Tribute Series JB2, Natural
9138 - G&L L2000 Tribute Bass, 3-Tone Sunburst
9702 - G&L L2500 5 String Bass, Walnut
9593 - Gibson Firebird Studio Reverse 70s Bass
9575 - Gibson Grabber 3 '70s Tribute Honeyburst
10074 - Gretsch G6073 Electrotone Bass, Burgundy
0000 - Levin - 7 models in stock now
8073 - Lodestone Primal Artist
8075 - Lodestone Primal Instinct J Bass, Green
8079 - Lodestone Primal Instinct P Bass, Green
8080 - Lodestone Primal Instinct Pbass Sunburst
8081 - Lodestone Primal Pro in Chignal Blue
8082 - Lodestone Primal Pro 4, Tobacco Sunburst
8174 - Lodestone Primal Pro 5, Chignal Blue
4179 - Marleaux Consat Custom 5, Satin Black
10279 - Marleaux Consat Sig 4 String Bolt On
5713 - Marleaux M Bass Custom 5, Maple & Walnut
10278 - Marleaux Votan XS Deluxe, Black
10216 - MusicMan Sterling 4, Blue, Pre-Owned
4703 - MusicMan Stingray 2EQ, Blue Pearl
4781 - MusicMan Stingray 3EQ, True Gold
4920 - MusicMan Stingray 5, Black
8997 - Musicman Sterling SB14 Bass, Sunburst
5110 - NS Design NXT Electric Double Bass
9002 - Overwater Aspiration Deluxe Bass, Black
8435 - Overwater Aspiration Std 4, Black Cherry
7849 - Overwater Contemporary Jazz, Trans Blue
9009 - Overwater Contemporary 5-String Bass
9867 - Overwater Inspiration Jazz PJ 4 String
10102 - Overwater J Series Deluxe 4, Natural
7259 - Overwater Perception Std 5, Bubinga
10152 - Overwater Progress Deluxe, Pre-Owned
9418 - Rickenbacker Bass, Jetglo Rick Kemp
5121 - Rockbass Streamer LX5, Black
7204 - Squier Classic Vibe Precision 50s Blonde
9072 - Squier Vintage Modified 70's Jazz, Nat
9517 - Squier Vintage Modified Tele Bass, Black
9704 - Stagg BC300 Lefthanded 4 String, Nat
4417 - Steinberger Spirit XT2 4 String Bass
9428 - Tobias Toby Standard IV Bass Guitar, White
9653 - Warwick Bass Guitar Accessory Gig Pack
6447 - Westcoast BG2, Natural or Trans Red
6446 - Westcoast BG4 Neck Thru Body, Brown
6445 - Westcoast BG5 Fretless, Natural
6448 - Westcoast JB5, Trans Amber
8438 - Westcoast JP1 4 String Bass in Black
8437 - Westcoast JP1 4 String Bass in Trans Red
10120 - Yamaha BB1024X 4 String, Caramel Brown
4649 - Yamaha BB2024X, Vintage White
9350 - Yamaha BB424 Bass Guitar in Black
9351 - Yamaha BB425 5 String Bass Guitar, Black
9352 - Yamaha BB425 5 String Bass, Sunburst
9000 - Yamaha RBX170
10314 - Yamaha RBX170EW Bass
8999 - Yamaha RBX5A2 5 String Bass, Black
6360 - Yamaha SLB200 Silent Double Bass
4331 - Yamaha TRB1004J, Trans Black
10307 - Yamaha TRBX304 Bass
10308 - Yamaha TRBX305 Bass
10310 - Yamaha TRBX505 Bass

Classical Guitars

0000 - Azahar - 6 models in stock now
10290 - Breedlove Passport N250/COe Electro
7365 - Jose Ferrer 3/4 Size Classical Guitar
0000 - Mendieta - 6 models in stock now
9482 - Ovation 1616 Classical Guitar, Pre-Owned
0000- Raimundo - 4 models in stock now
0000 - Ramirez - 10 models in stock now
5828 - Roberto - 3 models in stock now
5481 - Strunal Electro Classical Guitar
9404 - Takamine G344RC Electro, Wine Red
0000 - Tanglewood - 4 models in stock now
8351 - Westcoast - 5 models in stock now
10323 - Yamaha CGX102 Guitar
10321 - Yamaha NTX700 Guitar

For full guitar details, pricing and photos, enter the number next to each guitar model into our SKU search facility on the website.

Guitar & Bass

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It's always good to have options...

Fender's desire to satisfy the needs of as many guitarists as possible is to be applauded, and few would argue that plenty of choice is a good thing. However, having a plethora of Stratocasters to choose from can make pondering a potential purchase a much more involved experience. In an attempt to help you select the right Fender Stratocaster for you, this month's cover feature goes through a mix of various models in the range, suggesting why you would want to buy one in particular instead of any of the others, and revealing when it might be worth spending some more money to trade up in models – or worth saving a few quid on a more cost-effective guitar.

And the reviews don't just stop there; gear from Gibson, Washburn and Roland – to name but three – are also within these pages for your delectation. Quality interviews with Michael Schenker and Luther Dickinson are provided for your entertainment, whilst the opportunity to have a gander at Steve Rothery's guitar collection isn't one to be passed up. Finally, my Anthem Publishing colleagues inform me we are running a January sale, offering you the chance to save money with all kinds of juicy offers. Who am I to stop you from saving some of your hard-earned, so please turn to page 84 of the issue to check out what works for you...

John

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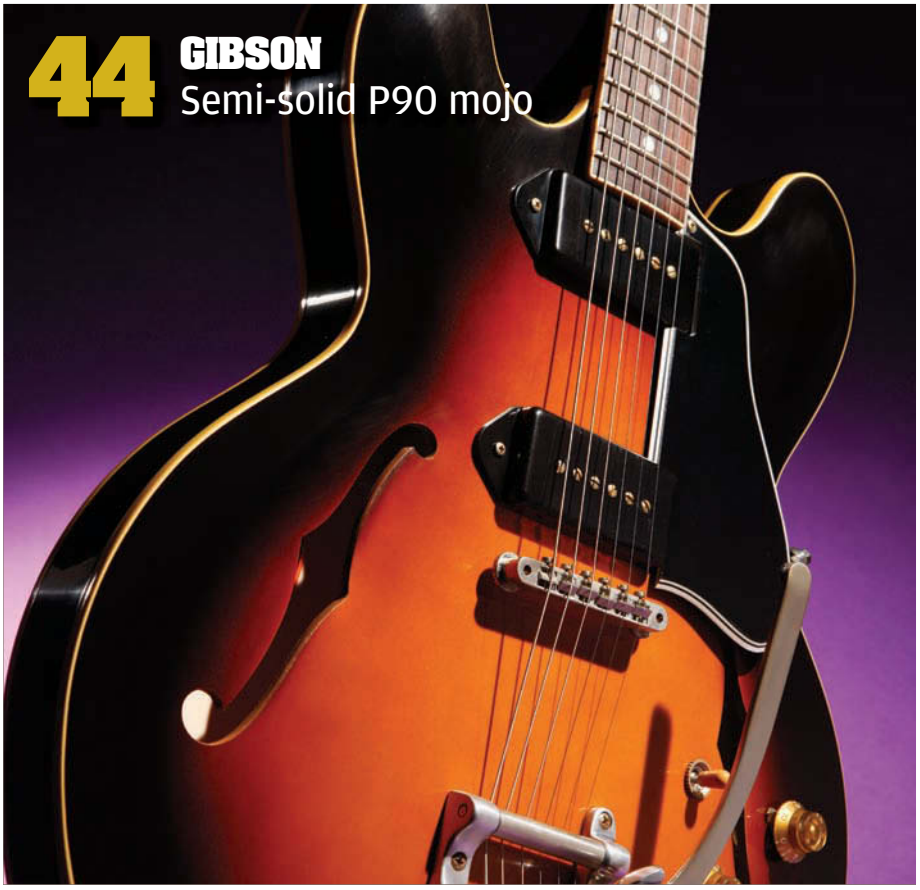
Cover photo: Claire Collins



Gear

Gibson Luther Dickinson ES-335 44
Marry a centre-block ES-335 with two snarly P90s, add a Bigsby and you have a guitar that is fiendishly hard to put down

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Cramming the sound of 1971 into a more modern and adaptable 100W package

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Bishop Of Denmark Street 96
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Reverberations

Write to *Guitar & Bass*, Anthem Publishing, Station House, Station Approach, off North Street, Carshalton, SM5 2HW or e-mail us: guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com
Please note, we reserve the right to edit where we feel it is appropriate, or to print extracts from longer correspondences

STAR LETTER

PLEADING GUILTY

I'm writing this letter to you partly as a confession – in an attempt to make myself feel better – and partly as a warning to all other guitar players who are over-competitive. I'm going to omit the names of the innocent (and the guilty), but here's the story.

I started a rock'n'roll band with school friends a long time ago (put it this way, I'm never seeing 50 again). Although there were some good times, I can't say that I enjoyed it that much. Why? Well, and I'm ashamed to admit it, the other guitar player in the band was lots better than me and I spent a lot of the time being very jealous of him. No matter how hard I practiced, he seemed to just go past me without making any effort. And the worst of it was, he was a really good laugh and a nice guy. But him being encouraging about my playing, and never lording his superior ability over me, just made my hatred of him worse. I couldn't kick him out of the band; everyone liked him and knew he was by far the best musician. Getting him kicked out would only have made it obvious to everyone what a horrible person I was. However, given that I wanted to be the best guitar player in the world and wasn't even the best guitar player in my band, it was hard to take. My way of dealing with it was to affect a nonchalant air and say very little to anyone. For most people, guitar playing is supposed to take you out of your shell. Well, for me it sent me right into one!

Anyways, eventually the band broke up shortly after we all left school as life got in the way. The other guitar player left town and we lost touch for a long time. Eventually, about two years ago, our drummer got in touch to ask if I was willing to get the band back together. He'd found everyone else and they were willing to do it. I agreed straight away, but five seconds after I put the phone down all the old negative feelings hit me and I nearly rang back to say I wasn't playing.

After an evening's brooding over it, I decided to be an adult for once and get over myself. A couple of weeks later we met up for a rehearsal and it was great to see them again. Unfortunately, I learned that our fellow guitar player had not had the best of luck over the last few years, including divorce, illness and money problems. He was clearly into doing this gig as a way of remembering the good ol' days. I was delighted (genuinely, honest) to see him and them all again, but as we prepared to start by going through some old covers really badly, I got that feeling of dread once again that I was about to be proved second best.

It quickly had become clear, however, that my fellow guitar player was now, in fact, rubbish. He admitted that he hadn't picked up a guitar since he'd left the band, whilst I had kept going. Although I never made it as the best guitar player in the world, I was better than I was at 15, whereas he was a darn sight worse. Given that it was a bit of fun, there was no chance of any of the band having a go at our guitar player. As the rehearsal went on we mutually agreed that I'd take over some of the lead parts that he used to do. All sounds fairly mature, doesn't it?

However, my confession stems from the total flipping joy I felt about the whole thing. It felt like I'd won! Like I'd finally got a chance to knock the school bully out. Except this wasn't the school bully, this was an old friend who'd fallen on hard times – and one who didn't even know he was competing with me in the first place. And there's me jumping for joy that I can play some old rock'n'roll songs better than he can. I know guitar playing can be a competitive thing, but I warn all guitar players out there not to get too involved – if you're not careful it can ruin everything.

Martin *via email*

Rosetti

Written a Star Letter? Contact Rosetti on 01376 550033 to claim your Rickenbacker goodie bag

G&B **Woah! Don't know about the rest of you, but this one stopped us in our tracks. There can't be too many guitarists out there that didn't feel a pang of jealousy when another player from their particular circle nailed a song or solo before they did, and this tale of teenage insecurity took us right back to those days. So it was even more understandable that – despite the maturity gained in the passing years – those feelings would come back to you. Now if you've left out the part where you laughed in his face and then skipped around the room shouting 'I'M BETTER THAN YOU NOW! I WIN!' then, yeah, you need to apologise. However, if you didn't do that, then we absolve you, my son... and we also formally endorse your warning to not get too competitive. Yes, it can be a useful motivating factor, and it's always nice to get an ego boost. But Martin's letter is a great example of how it can take the fun out of it all. Unless, of course, said guitar player is a real reprehensible so-and-so...**

GUITARSHOPPLAYINGPHOBIA

To Jimir, author of the Star Letter (*G&B* January 2014), and his revelation of Guitarshopplayingphobia, can I just say 'Thank you, thank you, thank you!' I no longer feel alone. It's surprising that you can play a well-attended gig without any problem at all, but trying an instrument in a music shop turns you into the musical equivalent of a uncoordinated elephant for all the reasons Jimir listed. But lack of confidence is not the sole domain of the amateur player. On Sky Arts 1 *Talks Music* even Jeff Beck readily admitted to confidence being a major issue for him. I mean... JEFF BECK!? Where does that leave us mere guitar mortals?

Maybe Pete Townshend's wise words can help: 'If in doubt, just play!'

Richard Underwood *via email*

I have just read the Star Letter in the January issue about being nervous playing in a guitar shop, and wanted to add my thoughts.

I have bought countless guitars in shops over the last 20 years and have never experienced this anxiety. That's not because I'm an amazing guitarist – far from it – but because I am listening to a guitar for myself, not performing. Sometimes I might pretty much get the measure of a guitar by

Hank Brian Marvin: an iconic Strat player, no doubt

doing not much more than strumming a few chords, or sometimes I'll dig in and play some pentatonic stuff, flick between the pickups and channels on the amp and spend a bit of time answering all the questions I have about the tone and feel of the axe, but I don't care what the other people in the shop are doing; I am auditioning a guitar, not being auditioned myself.

The other customers probably wouldn't be impressed by my G, D, C, but I honestly don't think they care. Surely they would think like me and realise that I'm just listening to the guitar and not giving them a second thought.

Richard Welsby *via email*

G&B **Thanks to both Richards, and indeed the many other guitar players who got in touch regarding this subject. It's lovely to know that guitar players can be such supportive and helpful people. We selected the letters above on the subject as they succinctly highlighted what seemed to be the two most fundamental points raised in all the feedback. Firstly, lacking confidence can affect the best of players; secondly, it's wise to just concentrate on what you're doing, and don't treat it as a performance. After all, no one's really listening to you in a guitar shop, so there's nothing to worry about.**

A HANK-LESS TASK

I refer to the article *Sixties Stratocasters* published in the January 2014 issue of *Guitar & Bass*. Page 24 highlights a list of 'Iconic Strats and the players who made them famous'. I would agree that those mentioned are indeed some of the most iconic Strat players, but there is one glaring omission. Hank B Marvin owned (thanks to Sir Cliff Richard) the first Strat ever to reach Britain and he was surely one of the most influential guitarists in the UK at that time. To overlook his involvement as an iconic Strat player is an appalling omission! I read the magazine on a regular basis and have always (until now) found the content to be well-researched and accurate.

John Hall *via email*

G&B **We promise you, John, we meant no disrespect to the great Hank Marvin. However, we ran a story regarding Hank having the first Strat in the UK back in March 2007 and, although the evidence isn't definitive, it looks likely that he received the guitar in April 1959... so it was a combination of wanting to give some lesser-told stories some exposure and a desire to be as historically accurate as we could be. When investigating vintage guitars and the stories behind them, it's amazing how little is often written down or remembered by the people there at the time. Sometimes educated guesses are all that's left, but we try and provide the facts as much as possible.**

KEEPING IT STRICTLY GUITAR

I enjoyed the letter from the man who fell in love with Irish bouzouki in the last issue, and I've no desire to rain on his parade at all. Indeed, a lot of my guitar-playing friends have in the last year or so also decided to get to grips with other stringed instruments such as the banjo, mandolin and ukulele. However, I can't help but think 'What's wrong with just playing the guitar?' Do people just get a bit bored of it after playing it for years? I certainly haven't, and although I do admire people who play a multitude of instruments, I want to spend the precious little time I have to play music these days on getting better at my chosen instrument. Surely your good selves at *Guitar & Bass* will back me up on this?

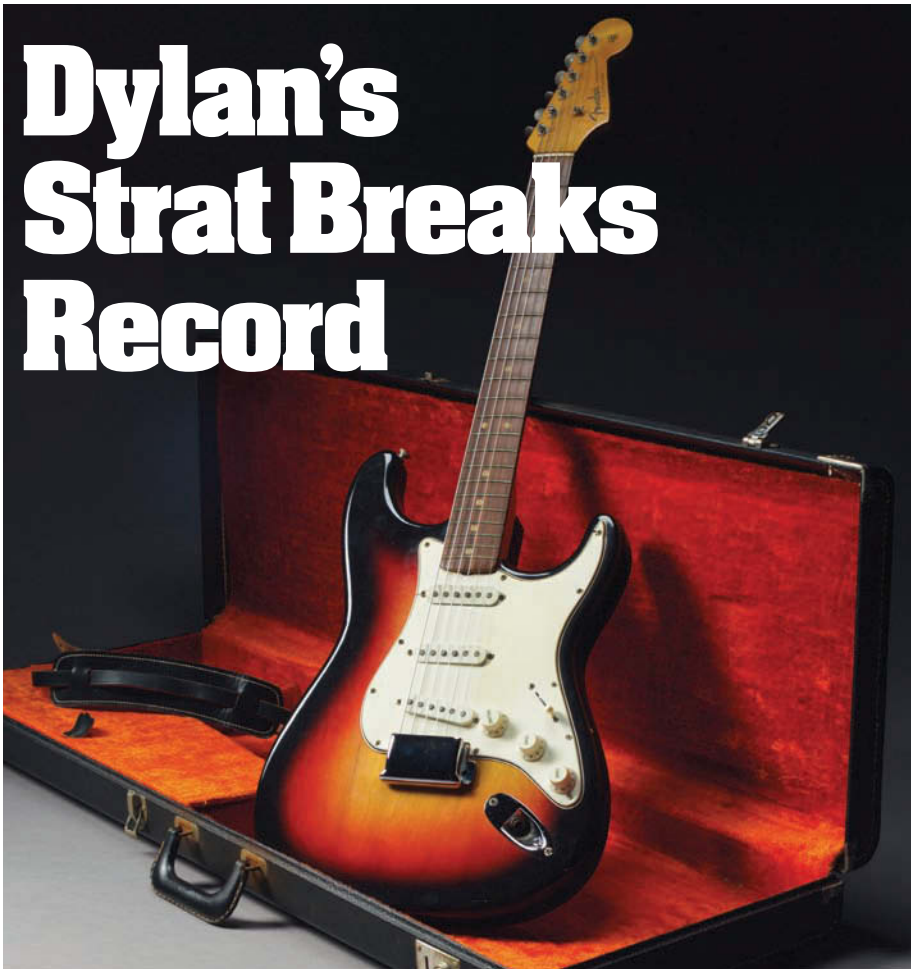
Frank Wallinger *via email*

G&B **You know how to start an argument, sir, and no mistake. This one has divided the office into two camps: those who think that playing as many instruments as you like is inherently a good thing, as opposed to those who think it's better to stick with one or two things at the most and working hard on becoming as proficient as possible as you can on those instruments. In genres such as folk, the guitar is a part of a stringed instrument family, and people barely bat an eye when it comes to switching around. However, plenty of people dedicate themselves to one instrument alone. While we obviously love guitar-playing to death, we also love music-making of pretty much any kind in general. If you have an itch to play something else, then by all means go ahead and scratch it. On plenty of occasions it can make your understanding of music better and can enhance your guitar-playing enjoyment all the more. In the same way that we wouldn't look down at anyone who has switched to guitar and/or bass after having played another instrument, it seems fundamentally wrong to disapprove of a guitarist playing any other musical instrument. But guitars are – and will always be – the best of all, just in case anyone was wondering...**

Could a banjo like this tempt you away from your guitar?

Woke up this mornin'... NEWS

Dylan's Strat Breaks Record



The Strat that Bob Dylan used to 'go electric' at the Newport Folk Festival fetches the highest price ever paid for a guitar at auction

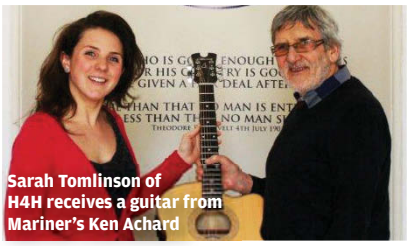
In December, at Christie's in New York, Bob Dylan's fabled Newport Fender Stratocaster fetched $965,000 (£590,432), beating, by $6,000, the previous guitar auction record held by Eric Clapton's legendary 'Blackie' Strat, which realised $959,000 in 2004. The 1964 sunburst Fender Stratocaster had been put up for sale with its original strap and hard case with an estimate of $300-$500,000 attached.

It was July 1965 when Dylan, undisputed leader of the early '60s folk movement, took the stage at the Newport Folk Festival and dumbfounded the traditionalist audience by playing his first-ever electric set. It comprised just three songs, most notably the raucous *Maggie's Farm,* but this controversial, era-defining act led to a fight in front of the stage (and, later on, to cries of 'Judas!' from his previously devoted following). The Strat that aided Dylan in this 'treachery' was left on a private plane by the great man as he made his escape, perhaps indicating he may have been having some misgivings about making the switch. At the time the pilot attempted to contact Dylan's management to return the instrument, but his efforts were ignored. The guitar remained with the pilot's New Jersey family for almost 50 years and caused some debate when it came to light; many, including Dylan himself, were unconvinced that this was actually the Newport Strat.

Experts Andy Babiuk (author, vintage guitar dealer and consultant to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame) and Dylan memorabilia guru Jeff Gold were called in to verify the authenticity of the guitar. They studied photos and footage of the event and examined the grain patterns in the wood to confirm that this was undoubtedly the guitar. In typical style Dylan has remained tight-lipped, and the 'absentee buyer' so far has yet to be named.

Guitars for Heroes

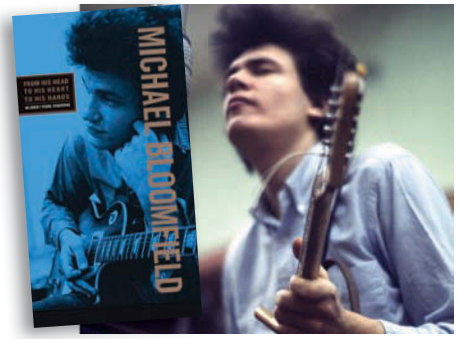
The Help For Heroes flagship recovery unit at Tedworth Hall in Wiltshire now has a therapy facility which uses playing music to help members of the armed forces overcome injury and illness. 'Music is a fantastic way to keep our wounded and sick personnel engaged both physically and mentally,' says Roger Coates, who runs the beginner's workshops. Ken Achard of Mariner Guitars has led the way in donating instruments and is urging other builders and distributors to follow suit. Go to www.helpforheroes.org.uk or www.marinerguitars.com for more info.



Sarah Tomlinson of H4H receives a guitar from Mariner's Ken Achard

BOX OF BLOOMFIELD

Many believe Michael Bloomfield eclipses Clapton as the true pioneer of blues rock, and a new Bloomfield anthology, *From His Head To His Heart To His Hands,* provides compelling evidence for the case. The three-CD set gathers solo material, previously unreleased early demos, work with the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, Electric Flag, Muddy Waters and more. The set also includes a documentary DVD premiere of *Sweet Blues: A Film about Michael Bloomfield*. Available 3 February.



Santana Boogie

Carlos Santana can be credited with introducing Mesa/Boogie to the world on his 1972/'73 tour and the new limited edition 1x12" King Snake is a replica of the amp he used to do it. There are subtle improvements to enhance performance and add versatility, but essentially it's the amp that many see as the transitional link between the low-gain amps of yesteryear and today's high-gain multi-channel blasters. For more info on the famous sound, pay a visit to www.mesaboogie.com.

SUPRO AMPS RELAUNCH

Supro has almost become a byword for ancient little valve amps that ooze raucous tone. National Resophonic and Dobro merged in the early '30s to form Valco, which began manufacturing amps under the Supro name soon afterwards. They found favour with many of the original Chicago blues players and won a special place in amplifier history. Sadly production ceased in the mid-'60s and the amps have become much sought-after by collectors and tone-hounds alike, but excitingly, after almost 40 years, they're coming back. Builder of quality stompboxes Pigtronix (the parent company is actually called Absara Audio) have acquired the Supro brand and plan to revive some classic amp models in 2014. The amps will be made in the USA, with former Fender amp designer Bruce Zinky and award-winning sound designer David Koltai being tasked to realise a modern incarnation of the Supro sound. Supro amps have tempted the great and the good over the years; notably, Jimmy Page is said to have used one all over the early Led Zeppelin material. Keep an eye on www.suprousa.com for updates.

NEW Guitar & Bass website: www.guitar-bass.net

We are very proud to announce the launch of the brand new *Guitar & Bass* magazine website, which will bring you the latest from the world of guitar 24 hours a day, seven days a week. On top of up-to-the-minute news you'll get reviews, DIY workshops, tuition, interviews, vintage info and so much more. Go to www.guitar-bass.net to join us.

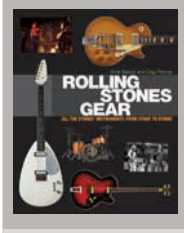
NEWS IN BRIEF

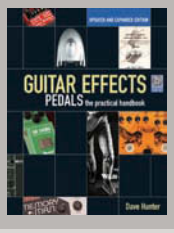
Wilko on DVD

Wilko Johnson announced he had terminal cancer in 2013 and might only have months to live. He immediately packed up his famous Tele and commenced a farewell tour, with this show in Camden in London on March 2013 being the last night. It was emotional and exhilarating in equal measure and is captured brilliantly on this DVD, *Live At Koko*, which includes an intimate post-gig interview.

Essential Reading

Two great new books from Backbeat dig deep into cool kit. *Rolling Stones Gear* documents the equipment that served on every single tour and studio session from the Stones' inception up until the present day. It was a whopping nine years in the making, and the 672 pages boast many rare images of the band's actual gear. *Guitar Effects Pedals: The Practical Handbook* simply tells you everything you need to know about effects, including interviews with pedal creators. Go to www.backbeatbooks.com to get your fix.





Garcia Travis Bean sale

The late Grateful Dead's Jerry Garcia was renowned for playing his metal-necked Travis Bean guitars and as we went to press his third and last was due to be auctioned off in December at Bonhams in London. The TB500 (serial number 11) was modified with an extra pickup for use with a synth, and as it's believed to be one of the first guitars to have been used like this, it's a real piece of rock history. We hope it found a suitably freak-friendly home.

Calendar SHOWS, GIGS, FESTIVALS, WORKSHOPS

The Great British Rock & Blues Festival

24-27 JANUARY

Three Skeggy nights of wintery blues rock from the Yardbirds, Dr Feelgood, Wilko Johnson, Nine Below Zero, Stan Webb's Chickenshack and the Quireboys

WHERE? **Butlins Skegness**
TICKETS **from £95 per person based on 4 sharing**
CONTACT **www.bigweekends.com/splash-pages/rock-blues.aspx**

Giants Of Rock

7-10 FEBRUARY

Down south, Butlins' new rock fest boasts a sterling lineup of classic acts including Blue Öyster Cult, Big Country, Sweet, Martin Barre, Martin Turner's Wishbone Ash, Uriah Heep, Hawkwind and Sweet,

WHERE? **Butlins Minehead, Somerset**
TICKETS **from £110 per person based on 4 sharing**
CONTACT **www.bigweekends.com/splash-pages/giants_of_rock.aspxww.**

The Eagles

28 MAY-26 JUNE

In the wake of the revealing *History Of The Eagles* documentary released earlier this year, Joe Walsh, Glenn Frey, Timothy B Schmit and Don Henley come to the UK for 11 shows spread out over a month

WHERE? **London, Birmingham, Manchester, Glasgow, Leeds and Liverpool**
TICKETS **See outlets**
CONTACT **www.eaglesband.com**

Sonisphere 2014

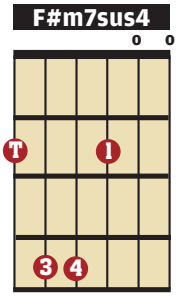
4-6 JULY

This concert represents the only gigs Metallica or Iron Maiden will play in the UK in the whole of 2014, so demand should be high. Prodigy are the third headliner. It's gonna be a unmissable mosh-fest, so buy early

WHERE? **Knebworth Park, Hertfordshire**
TICKETS **£214 (early bird)**
CONTACT **http://sonisphere.co.uk/**

The Lost Chord

A singer-songwriters' favourite for a bit of edgy, droney minor texture, the F#m7sus4 can sit in almost anywhere during a song and add a certain something. Simply shifting the shape up the neck to the 5th, 7th and 9th fret positions creates some useful extra twists to the theme too.



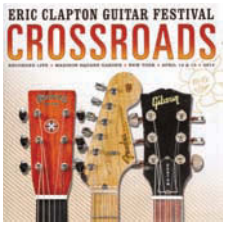
Album reviews

Eric Clapton Guitar Festival

CROSSROADS

Rhino

Clapton's charitable guitar spectacular moved indoors for the first time in 2013 and the resulting double album (also out on DVD) is a veritable feast of guitar. The cavernous Madison Square Garden housed a host of greats with Robert Cray, Jimmie



Vaughan, Jeff Beck, Buddy Guy and Keith Richards amongst an army of others, all on duty alongside Eric himself. The biggest six-string fest ever? It could just be.

Deep Purple

NOW WHAT?! GOLD EDITION

EarMUSIC

Purple's first outing since the passing of Hammond organ giant John Lord was given a perhaps understandably subdued release in mid 2013, yet that sad reminder of mortality seems to have revitalised Lord's cohorts. Many have called

it their best work in decades, and this edition adds a live disc to a package that proves there's yet more gas in the tank. Classic and rock in all the right places.

Snakefinger's History Of The Blues

LIVE IN EUROPE

Promising Music

A curious but engaging live set from 1983, with maverick guitarist Philip 'Snakefinger' Lithman of avant-garde band the Residents taking you on a journey through the various nuances of the blues and its most famed exponents. From Furry Lewis

to Bobby Bland to Buddy Guy, he does them all with no little flair and skill. Droll introductions and his eight-piece band assist proceedings. An odd, offbeat delight.

Krossborder: The Best Of British Blues

KOMPILATION VOL 1

Krossborder

Krossborder is a new label launched to promote the rich talent on the British blues scene – although as the name suggests they're quite prepared to look further afield if prospects from elsewhere emerge. The names won't be familiar to all – Little Devils,

Tom Gee, the Idle Hands – but this 16-strong collection of songs reveals a scene in rude health, while Bluesbreakers 'Beano' style artwork signposts the laudable intentions.

Glenn Tilbrook

HAPPY ENDING

Quixotic

Although the Squeeze frontman's guitar escapades have a modest but devoted following, it's Tilbrook's lyrical story-led songwriting that has always been closest to his heart and that's what continues to shine here. This gentle unplugged collection sees

him employing sitar, ukulele bass and unassuming acoustic work to weave a rich backdrop to his astute narratives. Warm, welcoming, whimsical and engrossing.

No Sinner

BOO HOO HOO

Provogue

Female-fronted blues-infused rock all the way from Vancouver that packs a ton of attitude. Singer Colleen Rennison ('no sinner' is her surname spelt backwards) is a bona fide blues belter in the Janis Joplin tradition while guitarist Eric Campbell keeps

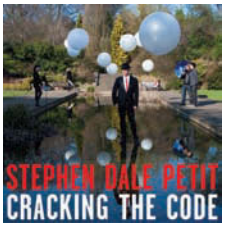
the roadhouse attack rolling with potent pentatonic leads and buzzsaw riffage. Smouldering torch songs mix it with raucous screamers to palpitating effect.

Stephen Dale Petit

CRACKING THE CODE

333

SDP's fifth album opens with an edgy, aggressive bombast of punked-up rocking blues in the shape of *Holla,* and the pace rarely dips. Petit is set on inspiring a 'blues revolution', and if this is the manifesto then recruits will be legion. Dr John,



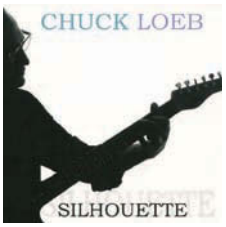
ex-Stone Mick Taylor and Black Keys' sticksman Patrick Carney contribute, while the late, great Hubert Sumlin's last licks on tape help fire the inspired SDP.

Chuck Loeb

SILHOUETTE

Moosicus

The man who replaced Larry Carlton in jazz supergroup Fourplay breezes through a new collection of solo compositions with some of the world's greatest players in support. Of course, it's smooth and sophisticated, but space and feel are



cultivated equally and the Latin-style final cuts with sultry vocals from wife Carmen Cuesta and daughter Christina will melt any remaining resistance. Possibly his best work.

Lincoln Durham

EXODUS OF THE DEEMED UNRIGHTEOUS

Droog

Haunting gut-bucket bottleneck stomp is Durham's new stock-in-trade and he's adopted the form as though he was born to it in a tin shack by the Mississippi. He preaches with total conviction, telling his dark tales to a throbbing

lo-fi beat. There are floods that wash away the blood, women who kill for kicks, and rich men who are clearly going to hell. Hollerin' and devilishly addictive Americana.

SNAP JUDGEMENTS

Small Engine Repair

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I-Label

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Paul Lamb & The Detroit Breakdown

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Casting CALL

It's the curvy classic that can do it all, depending on the pickups of course. But will a budget model deliver the delicious sounds and slinky feel of a high-end job? Grabbing nine current Strats with prices ranging from a couple of hundred quid up to well over a thousand, **Richard Purvis** sets out on a voyage of twang

Many electric guitar collections start with a Stratocaster, and many distinguished careers end up with one. We could fill up this whole introduction with a list of celebrity Strat fans, but no need. Let's just put Jimi at one end of the scale and Tony Blair at the other, and you can pop whoever you like in the space between.

Even to non-guitarists, Leo Fender's 1954 three-pickup wonder still has iconic status. It was badly abused in the '80s – that infamous chorus-drenched quack made Strats a no-go area for all non-suit-wearers for a generation – but it's safe to say we're past those painful associations now. And while street cred may rise and fall, this is a 60-year-old guitar that's never been in danger of going out of production.

Recent years have seen a torrent of new models at all prices, with leanings both vintage and modern, ensuring there really is a Strat for everyone... if you can find it. To help you do just that, we've called in nine of them for the definitive Strat round-up. It's not about seeing which one is best – given the price differentials involved, that would be unfair – but about getting to the bottom of each one's personality.

SQUIER
Affinity Strat HSS

At a glance

RRP **£226.80**

IMPORTANT SPECS
Made in China. Alder body with bolt-on maple neck and rosewood fretboard (no maple option), 21 frets, vintage-style vibrato bridge, diecast tuners. One humbucker and two single-coil pickups, five-way switch, master volume, tone for neck and middle pickups. Finishes: Montego black metallic (as reviewed), metallic blue, metallic red, black, Lake Placid blue, Olympic white, burgundy mist. Weight of review model: 3.3kg/7.3lbs

PERFECT FOR **Rocking out without splashing out**

CLOSEST COUSIN **The Squier Standard Strat HSS is your next-cheapest option with this pickup configuration**

It would be good to kick off with a simple, straightforward model with all the classic features to give us a handy reference point… but we won't. We're going in order of price, and the cheapest guitar on test is this distinctly non-vintage beast, with a scratchplate the colour of an incoming tornado and a humbucker in the bridge position. In fact it doesn't even say 'Stratocaster' on that '70s-style outsize headstock, just 'Strat'. Outrageous!

Still, everything else is more or less as it should be and the build quality is just about impeccable for the money. The tuners look less than sturdy and the neck finish is so matte it could almost be raw timber, but there are no playability issues and the unplugged tone is pleasantly breezy, with a scooped midrange that bodes well for modern metal action on that humbucker.

We'd best start with the single-coils, though. Both are sweet and plucky enough through a clean amp, and that's equally true of the in-between positions – although there's a slight darkening of the tone once the bridge pickup is brought into the mix. Switch to this unit on its own and the one thing more noticeable than the drop in treble content is the rise in output level: this is one big, barking 'bucker. There's still enough chime to make clear this isn't a Les Paul – in part because of the longer Fender scale length – but the invitation to add some lunatic distortion is impossible to resist.

On goes the stompbox and out comes the fire-farting monster. The single-coils perform well enough in rockier conditions, retaining good clarity and definition, but the fun is all on the bridge pickup, especially once you start wriggling up the neck and abusing that whammy bar in true superstrat style. Nice… but now can we try a Stratocaster, please?

SQUIER
Vintage Modified Stratocaster

At a glance

RRP **£289.80**

IMPORTANT SPECS
Made in Indonesia. Basswood body with bolt-on maple neck and rosewood fretboard (no maple option), 21 frets, vintage-style vibrato bridge, vintage-style tuners. Three Duncan Designed single-coil pickups, five-way switch, master volume, tone for neck and middle pickups. Finishes: black, three-tone sunburst, vintage blonde. Weight of review model: 3.4kg/7.5lbs

PERFECT FOR **Sweet clean tones with a vintage vibe**

CLOSEST COUSIN **Up your budget and try the Fender Classic Series '60s version**

The word 'vintage' promises something a little less likely to upset the Shadows fans in the room, and sure enough this is Squier's best attempt to capture the spirit of a pure Strat – albeit in a guitar that's made from basswood, not alder or ash, and in Indonesia rather than California. The fret ends are perhaps just a teeny bit snaggy in places but again, overall, you can't deny this is a very well-made instrument for under the £300 mark. It's another with a dirty great post-CBS paddle for a headstock, and from 10 feet away you'd struggle to tell it from a real '70s Fender.

Our first proper all-single-coil guitar of the test brings us to the Stratocaster's first real design flaw: three pickups and only two controls. In this case, as usual, the bridge unit simply bypasses the tone circuit and has to put up with being a bit shrill sometimes. Nearly all Telecasters these days have modernised circuitry for increased tonal control – is there really no solution for the Strat's little weakness? Well, of course there is – we'll see two of them later in the test.

This time the acoustic voice is a little stronger in the midrange, and that's just as true once we're plugged in. The pickups are Duncan Designed – that's Seymour's Korean-made budget range – and all three can produce strong, deep tones through the right amp. This is a Stratocaster with plenty of 'thrap' and it does a convincing *Sweet Home Alabama* in position four. At clean settings you might wonder whether the neck pickup could do with being just a tad brighter; with overdrive, you might find it positively murky. The other four settings all stand up well but this guitar is not a huge sustainer and, somehow, you get the feeling that it just doesn't really want to be a rock guitar. Still, decent twang for little money.

SQUIER
Deluxe Stratocaster

At a glance

RRP **£418.80**

IMPORTANT SPECS
Made in Indonesia. Basswood body with bolt-on all-maple neck (no rosewood fretboard option), 22 frets, two-point vibrato bridge, diecast tuners. Three Duncan Designed single-coil pickups, five-way switch, master volume, tone for neck and middle pickups. Finishes: Pearl white metallic (as reviewed), daphne blue. Weight of review model 3.4kg/7.5lbs

PERFECT FOR
Noodling after hours in a cruise ship's ballroom

CLOSEST COUSIN **The Fender American Deluxe Strat costs three times as much but the two have a lot in common**

Paler than an anaemic Hebridean housewife in her grandma's nightie, this is a guitar you could lose in a snowdrift – the gently metallic pearl white finish is actually lighter than the scratchplate, and even the maple board appears strangely washed-out. If the lack of contrast bothers you, don't worry: the Squier Deluxe Strat is also available in blue. Very, very light blue.

We reviewed Fender's US-made equivalent of this model not so long ago and found it extremely – perhaps excessively – polite. But this is another basswood-bodied instrument with Duncan Designed pickups, so its nearest neighbour in theory should be the Vintage Modified. There are differences aside from the fretboard material: we've moved to the smaller '50s headstock shape and the bridge is a more modern-looking unit, with matte-finished cast saddles and two pivoting screws (black ones). Again the Indonesian build quality is excellent and the medium jumbo frets well-dressed.

Maple boards are usually associated with a brighter, more snappy response than rosewood but some say the difference is minimal – and anyone who's spent some time with a Squier Deluxe Strat is likely to agree. This is a guitar with a clear but restrained top end. You wouldn't call it dull or muddy – the snappy Strat sparkle is there, it's just slightly subdued. You're unlikely to curse the lack of a tone control for the bridge pickup on this one.

The addition of overdrive increases the danger of descending into murkiness, especially on the neck pickup, but we wouldn't rule this out as a blues guitar. Not many people will be sent into a swoon by it, but if you're looking for refinement – and find that colour elegant rather than sickly – this could be a good place to start.

FENDER
Standard Stratocaster

At a glance

RRP **£538.80**

IMPORTANT SPECS
Made in Mexico. Alder body with bolt-on all-maple neck (rosewood fretboard optional), 21 frets, vintage-style vibrato bridge, diecast tuners. Three Standard single-coil pickups, five-way switch, master volume, tone for neck and middle pickups. Finishes: Arctic white (as reviewed), black, Lake Placid blue, midnight wine, candy apple red, brown sunburst. Weight of review model: 3.4kg/7.5lbs

PERFECT FOR
Full-on rock spank

CLOSEST COUSIN **Perhaps an American Standard souped up with some hot aftermarket pickups**

Now we're into Fender-branded territory. 'Standard' suggests something solid and definitive, the archetypal Stratocaster from which all others are derived, and that certainly used to be the point but it's not so simple nowadays. If you're expecting this to be just a more cheaply-assembled version of the American Standard, your next think is approaching fast.

First, though, we should stop to admire the look of this guitar. The colour range available for this model is wide but we're not complaining about having another white Strat on our hands, because this time the Hebridean housewife has popped on a sweater and has a little warmth in her cheeks. The finish may be called Arctic white but it's positively creamy compared to the pearl white of the Squier, and the maple neck is of a richer shade too; think Jimi at Woodstock. This might just be the silkiest neck yet, with chubby but low-profile frets, and it's topped off by a '50s-style headstock with a '70s-style black logo.

Acoustically this one is agreeably full and smooth with not much in the way of zing, but how much influence all that has on the amplified voice is hard to say, because these pickups are hot – alarmingly hot. They're by far the loudest single-coils we've heard so far, and everything you put into them comes out ferociously lush. This means it doesn't have the same transparency and subtle dynamics as a 'traditional' Fender solidbody, but that's not to say its vintage character has been obliterated completely. The neck pickup is good for brisk and breezy strumming, and there's plenty of bite in the other two. This time the inability to pull back the treble on the bridge pickup might well be an issue for some, but easing off on the volume helps somewhat.

FENDER
Classic Series '60s Stratocaster

At a glance

RRP **£706.80**

IMPORTANT SPECS
Made in Mexico. Alder body with bolt-on maple neck and rosewood fretboard (no maple option), 21 frets, vintage-style vibrato bridge and tuners. Three vintage-style single-coil pickups, five-way switch, master volume, tone for neck and middle pickups. Finishes: three-colour sunburst (as reviewed), Lake Placid blue, black, candy apple red. Weight of review model: 3.7kg/8.1lbs

PERFECT FOR **Old-school blues and classic rock**

CLOSEST COUSIN **An actual 1960s Stratocaster... in looks, at least**

With its deep sunburst finish, mint green scratchplate and cream plastic bits, this is perhaps the most 'vintage'-looking Strat so far. We're back to a rosewood fingerboard, and the lack of a solid colour allows us to make out that it's a two-piece body. The Fender logo is gold and the tuners are old-fashioned Kluson types, while the frets are thinner and maybe a tiny bit higher than those on the Standard. It feels like quality... until we look at the output socket and notice the first real build problem of the whole test: the metal plate is flapping loose at one end because the screw has gone clean through its hole, which must presumably have been drilled a fraction too wide. Tsk.

Acoustically this Strat has a lighter voice than the Standard – you could almost call it distant, and it certainly won't set your thighs a-throbbing when played sitting down. But the pickups look promising – the polepieces are staggered in historically correct fashion, standing well proud for the middle two strings but lurking lower than the cover for the B – and there's surely enough raw meat here for them to cook up something tasty.

Ah yes, this is the sweetest tone we've heard yet. It's clear and balanced, with five highly distinct voices, and makes the hot-headed Standard sound pretty boorish in comparison. You're likely to find that it's not quite as much fun to play, however, and the reason is that this model's focus on all things 'vintage' extends to the fretboard radius, which is 7.25" rather than the flatter 9.5" profile that most modern Fender fans are used to. One retro step too far? Well, some people like it that way, and it needn't be a problem, just as long as you're not up against a Charvel in a shredding contest.

FENDER
Pawn Shop '70s Stratocaster Deluxe

At a glance

RRP **£826.80**

IMPORTANT SPECS
Made in Mexico. Alder body with bolt-on all-maple neck (no rosewood fretboard option), 22 frets, fixed bridge, diecast tuners. One Enforcer 'Wide Range' humbucker and one Standard Tele single-coil pickup, three-way switch, master volume and tone. Finishes: black (as reviewed), two-colour sunburst, vintage white. Weight of review model: 3.4kg/7.5lbs

PERFECT FOR **Strat-buyers who don't like Strats**

CLOSEST COUSIN **Swap the pickups around and you've almost got a Tele Custom**

Call that a Strat!? It might fool us from behind, but one look at the hardware on the front makes clear that some – perhaps most – of the DNA in this startling mongrel comes from elsewhere in the Fender family. Well, the whole idea of the Pawn Shop series is to mash things up freely, and guitar design doesn't get much more mashed-up than this. Forget Strats for a second: the '70s was the era of interesting Telecasters – the Custom, the Deluxe and the twin-humbuckered Thinline – and that's where this model's origins really lie. Having said that, the scratchplate shape and single-coil neck pickup owe more to the original '69 Thinline. Oh, and the knobs are straight off a Jaguar. Or a Jazz Bass...

Let's stop inspecting the poor bugger and give it a play. The only fixed-bridge guitar on test, the Pawn Shop Deluxe clearly can't be expected to sound remotely like any of the others, even if it does share the classic 25.5" scale length and alder/maple construction. It sounds pleasant enough unplugged, though there's not a great deal of depth to it, and playability is more or less up there with the rest.

We'll start with the neck pickup, which may be a covered Telecaster-type but is at least the same distance from the bridge as it is on our conventional Strats. It's quite dark in tone and doesn't have masses of character, to be frank, but it's full enough and can be quite enjoyably piano-like on the wound strings. Things don't get a whole lot brighter in the middle position but here we do find some of the clucky articulation of a normal Tele beginning to appear. The Wide Range-style humbucker on its own is fat and honky – somewhat limited as a clean sound, but with definite potential for all sorts of indie-rock larks when overdriven.

Dirty Deed

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From the light, singing overdrive of classic rock to raunchy, screaming, ear-shattering distortion, the **Dirty Deed** was created for complete versatility. The tone is very organic and natural sounding; it's designed to capture the character and responsiveness of a classic overdriven tube amplifier with elements of distortion, fuzz and overdrive combined into a single wide-range pedal. With a turn of the gain knob you can go from the sparkling overdrive of your favorite classic rock songs to a rich, powerful hard rock distortion with amp-like saturation. The distortion is thick and beefy with a sweet spot in the mid-range EQ and a strong bass response, while highly responsive Treble, Bass, Gain and Level controls allow you to dial in your ideal sound whether you're using the **Dirty Deed** as your sole source of grit or you're adding some extra dirt to an already-overdriven amp.

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FENDER
American Special Stratocaster

At a glance

RRP **£934.80**

IMPORTANT SPECS
Made in USA. Alder body with bolt-on all-maple neck (no rosewood fretboard option), 22 frets, vintage-style vibrato bridge, diecast tuners. Three Texas Special single-coil pickups, five-way switch, master volume, Greasebucket tone for neck and bridge pickups. Finishes: candy apple red (as reviewed), surf green, two-colour sunburst. Weight of review model: 3.6kg/7.9lbs

PERFECT FOR **Clean pop and funk purposes**

CLOSEST COUSIN
See also the American Vintage models

At last we make it over the border into America – and here is proof that Fender can still make a proper Stratocaster in its home country and sell it over here for less than a grand. Just as Gibson has been putting out Les Paul Specials as stripped-back versions of its more expensive Standard models since the '50s, Fender has now picked up the same convention for its least expensive US-made instruments.

It doesn't really look noticeably stripped back, though, and any cost-cutting that's going on here is mostly under the bonnet. The candy apple red finish is deep and sparkly, there are no finishing issues to report on our review sample, and the all-maple neck is a silky joy. We haven't even mentioned neck profiles yet because they've all been of a fairly equal slimness; this one, however, feels just a fraction more meaty behind the nut.

The acoustic tone is open and breezy, not dissimilar to the Classic Series '60s Strat but with a wee bit less body in the low end, and the overriding characteristic of the Special's amplified voice is a lovely, papery thrap. The neck pickup is smooth and clear, while the bridge unit is probably the best we've heard yet, with all the snappy bark you could wish for backed up by just enough fullness. The middle pickup is rich and well-balanced, and here at last we find a solution to the 'two tone controls for three pickups' problem: the neck and bridge units use the Greasebucket tone circuit while this one has to manage without. It does so perfectly well.

For some players, there's enough evidence here to conclude that the Americans know best how to make an American guitar – but it must be conceded that the Special cannot match the Mexican-made '60s model for overdriven twang on the bridge pickup.

FENDER
Classic Series '50s Stratocaster Lacquer

At a glance

RRP **£958.80**

IMPORTANT SPECS
Made in Mexico. Alder body with bolt-on all-maple neck (no rosewood fretboard option), 21 frets, vintage-style vibrato bridge, vintage-style tuners. Three vintage-style single-coil pickups, five-way switch, master volume, tone for neck and middle pickups. Finish: candy apple red nitrocellulose only. Tweed hard case included. Weight of review model 3.2kg/7.1lbs

PERFECT FOR **Surf twang**

CLOSEST COUSIN **The near-identical non-lacquer version, of course**

Allow us to hop briefly back over the barbed wire for one more Mexican Fender: a fancy nitrocellulose finish takes this model above the American Special on price, if only by 20-odd quid. As the two we've been sent are both candy apple red, this gives us a fascinating opportunity to compare the costly nitro lacquer with its polyurethane equivalent – in terms of looks, at least. The tone debate is more tricky, as we don't know how different the two would have sounded unpainted. Anyway, no doubt the nitro finish will age more handsomely but for the moment the two look, um, about the same. They do smell different, though.

The '50s model's neck has a deep orangey hue that's as far away as can be from the pale sheen of those Squiers. Its other most striking visual quirk is the one-ply scratchplate: just a simple sliver of white plastic, as on the very first generation of Stratocasters. Some may find it a bit too white for the creamy 'aged' knobs and pickup covers, but you can always spill coffee on it (not really, please). Of more concern to lead players who like to do a lot of string-bending is that this, being another Strat with its roots in the olden days, shares the '60s version's 7.25" fretboard radius.

This Strat has maybe just a smidge less 'air' when strummed acoustically, despite the maple fingerboard, but it's a near-negligible difference that could easily be reversed on two other samples of the same models. When amplified they're fairly close too, despite the '60s Strat being a noticeably heavier instrument, and the '50s model's bridge pickup is missing perhaps just a sliver of low-end body. It's the wiriest-sounding yet, in fact, and a tone control on this one would have been very welcome indeed – though pulling the volume down a notch helps.

FENDER
American Standard Stratocaster

At a glance

RRP **£1,390.80**

IMPORTANT SPECS
Made in USA. Alder body (ash on Sienna sunburst version), bolt-on all-maple neck (rosewood board optional), 22 frets, two-point vibrato, diecast tuners. Custom Shop Fat '50s pickups, five-way switch, master volume, No-Load tone for neck and middle/bridge. Finishes: three-colour sunburst, Olympic white, black, jade pearl metallic, Sienna sunburst, mystic red, mystic blue. Hard case included. Weight of review model: 3.5kg/7.7lbs

PERFECT FOR **Summoning up the spirit of Stevie Ray**

CLOSEST COUSIN **Double the budget and start dreaming of the Custom Shop...**

Over we hop again, to finish up with what really ought to be the truly definitive Stratocaster. This is not the most expensive Strat in Fender's stable by a long way – there are signature models, Custom Shop models, models with deep flame finishes and pickups wound from unicorn hair – but what we have here is basically the mothership. Ours is another sunburst, this time with a maple fingerboard, and it looks about as classic as it possibly could without being in a glass case.

The American Standard Strat recently got a couple of upgrades: to 'aged' plastic parts, which just means they're not quite as white as the scratchplate; and to Custom Shop Fat '50s pickups, which is somewhat more significant. The alder body is another centre-joined two-piece; ours has a bit of a knot above the bridge but nothing that really detracts from its overall look of vintage lustability. It's slightly heavier than the Special, but in terms of feel there's really nothing in it. So let's see if we've got a decent acoustic voice for those pedigree pickups to work with.

Wow, we're not sure if we'd call that decent or indecent. It's the smoothest tone yet, strong and loud but not clanky, and the pickups know exactly what to do with it. Oh dear; how drearily predictable that the American Standard should be the best-sounding Strat of the bunch. As with the Mexican Standard, the sound is more full than you might be expecting, but this time the tone has been judged so tastefully that you couldn't possibly call it overcooked. On the neck pickup especially, this guitar is packed with soul. And just to top it off, the second tone control works on both middle and bridge pickups, which kicks that one little weakness right off a cliff.

The verdict

It always did look more glamorous than the trusty Tele, but the real secret of the Stratocaster's long-term success may lie in that third pickup. Including the two in-between positions – which were originally found more or less accidentally by players, and only later incorporated into the design by way of a five-way switch – any Strat is a versatile instrument. Blues, country, pop, metal, experimental industro-jazz post-worldbeat folk fusion – pretty much anything you can play on an electric solidbody guitar, you can play on virtually any of these nine models.

They're not all that different, then – but it would be quite wrong to say they all sound the same, or that the Squiers are just cheap imitations of their F-branded seniors. Let's get the really distinctive ones out of the way first: the Pawn Shop model is a Stratocaster in name and silhouette only, but is certainly worth trying out in its own right as long as you're happy with a more Tele-like character and are not after something with a whole load of top-end fizz; the Affinity HSS does respectable Strat sounds in four pickup positions and a pretty great metal trick in the fifth; and the Mexican Standard stands out for the simple reason that its pickups are hot enough to melt teeth. Some will love it, others will just be glad there are more traditionally-voiced options available in the same price range.

The other two Squiers hold their own admirably well for the money, particularly in terms of build quality, and the Vintage Modern is most impressive for clean-amp picking and chord work. That takes us to the two retro-aiming Mexican models and the two Americans. Here the differences are less broad, but the '50s and '60s versions seem to be essentially more mids-focused, while the US-made instruments purr a little more sweetly – even if the snappy, cheeky Special sometimes comes across as a little bit of a lightweight.

All four are speaking the same language, though... just in slightly different accents. So this is the point where any potential buyer is urged to go out and do their own test drives, because the final choice might come down to other, more personal factors: the look, the feel and most of all the price. Of course, expensive doesn't always mean good – but in the case of the American Standard, the big number doesn't lie. We said it ought to be the truly definitive Stratocaster, and it is.

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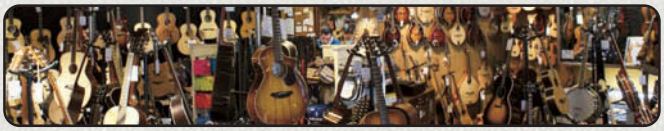

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Blues Crossing

Luther Dickinson and the North Mississippi Allstars are going back to their roots with an album dedicated to churning, elemental blues. Interview by **Rik Flynn**

The blues can so often lose its way. Gone are the days when it was a simple transmitter, a vehicle for folk in the Deep South to pass on their stories. So much time has passed since those turbulent days that it's easy to forget what it actually represents. So many modern-day interpretations are a hollow echo at best. The true soul of the genre lies not in the postured solos that sidetrack so many current offerings but in an intangible atmosphere, a multi-generational link, the continuation of the chain that passes on that unquantifiable feeling from elder to younger.

Perhaps, then, the duty of modern bluesmen is to renew the spirit and serve the zeitgeist of their own particular generation while harbouring within them the all-important ghosts of blues past. Forget humbuckers and foot-down widdling; forget over-produced ego-peddling; forget nicknames that feign a kinship with the greats. We're talking about the 'real' thing – the blues that exists as the natural musical language of the people. Of course, we're not suggesting that a skilled guitarist with a goldtop, a distortion pedal and a healthy dose of attitude can't get our juices flowing, but it isn't necessarily the blues. It follows the form, but all too often it can be something else entirely.

So how exactly does Luther Dickinson fit into all this? Luther's past, and in particular time spent with his late father and '60s session star Jim Dickinson, has obviously played a major part in his musical evolution. Now with a fair few albums under their belts, his band North Mississippi Allstars have refined their craft. New delivery *World Boogie Is Coming*, made with his brother Cody by his side and a band of fellow Mississippians, is without doubt their 'career-defining moment' and, what's more, it's the blues as it should be – natural, resonant and alive.

'Our father Jim grew up in the '50s – a first generation Memphis rock'n'roller,' Luther relates. 'He had an insane career and went on to make records with Jerry Wexler, Tom Dowd, Aretha Franklin, Bob Dylan, the Rolling Stones, Albert King, Albert Collins... so we grew up surrounded by American roots music of all genres.

'He and his friends were wild bohemians. They were playing folk music and surrounded by bluesmen like Bukka White, Sleepy John Estes, Robert Wilkins, Mississippi Fred McDowell – it was like a blues rediscovery. The bohemians and the blues masters would play the Memphis Country Blues Festival every year, and those two cultures and generations collaborating was the beginning of his generation's "world boogie". Then it happened again with us in the 1990s with RL Burnside, Junior Kimborough and Otha Turner. I really got turned onto classic blues from about 13 to 14 onwards... before that it was Black Flag, Van Halen, AC/DC and Jimi Hendrix!'

Aside from a brief foray into speed guitar, Luther embraced the blues tradition. 'I used

'I got into classic blues at 13 or 14. Before that it was Black Flag, Van Halen and Hendrix'

Gear

Guitars

Gibson Luther Dickinson Signature ES-335, Gibson ES-330 reissue, Harmony Sovereign and Kay jumbo acoustics, Scott Baxendale diddleybow

Amps

Fuchs, Fender Princeton, Marshall Bluesbreaker, Marshall 100W/50W Plexi, Silvertone

Photos: Mike Prior

Dickinson with new signature ES-335: 'I was like "This is it!"'

to shred a little bit, but at a certain point I had an epiphany because I was surrounded by the Mississippi hill country blues. As soon as I got out of high school, I just dived into that. Since I was exposed to all the Memphis and regional blues styles, I felt it was my responsibility to study up on them. I was so fascinated by it that one night I was listening to Fred McDowell and thought "We're going to start a band, call it the North Mississippi Allstars, and we're going to play the traditional repertoire!"'

Dickinson and his brother soaked up everything their surroundings had to offer. Inspired by local legends like RL Burnside and Otha Turner, they played and partied at Junior Kimborough's juke joint. Their debut *Shake Hands With Shorty* introduced their electric hill country blues to the world and earned them a Grammy nomination for Best Contemporary Album in the process, an award they would go on to win twice. It's a past that resonates still, and their generation-spanning ethos was perhaps most prevalent in their performance at the Bonneroo Festival in 2004. 'We played with Otha's family, RL Burnside and his family, and our father. That was the pinnacle of the concept – playing with the elders. It blew my mind, it blew my dad's mind! He didn't think my generation would have that kind of interaction with real bluesmen. Now all those guys are gone – my father's gone, Junior, Otha, RL...'

World Boogie is all about passing the torch and stamping out the exclusivity. The guestlist on the record reflects this, with a cast that includes Lightnin' Malcolm, Duwayne and Garry Burnside, Kenny Brown, Alvin Youngblood Hart, Sharde Thomas, Chris Chew, Sid and Steve Selvidge... and even the harmonica prowess of one Robert Plant.

'I wanted it to be a collective group of regional musicians who all played different versions of the same repertoire,' Luther explains. 'Hill country blues, even with the elders, was multi-generational and evolutionary. The cool thing is, it's what happens naturally. We're not trying to keep it museum-piece – that's what's unnatural! *World Boogie* is like an art project. We wanted this record to be like a cultural statement about Mississippi, more than just an album.'

And what of Robert Plant? 'Robert came to Memphis and said, "I wanna play harmonica in A." Man knows what he wants! We had an original and a Junior cover, and we cut it first take. He only had time for one song, so we snuck a medley in... two for one, you know!'

The concept for *World Boogie* had some input from a certain dungaree'd bluesman named Seasick Steve. Seasick saw Luther as a whole lot more than another pretender standing in line to deliver a diluted reflection of the blues; here was a young man who'd seen the chain of command first hand and who, with the modernist approach of his brother Cody, could weave the original threads to suit younger ears.

'I met Seasick at a festival – he'd seen a documentary of me down at Otha Turner's farm where I was playing old Fred McDowell tunes out on the porch and there were a bunch of folks dancing. It was like an old barnyard juke joint. We became really fast friends, but it was that first day that he grabbed me and said, "You are the link! You are the only person who has ever been down there on that cornfield. You can show the future generations what it was all about."

'The most important thing Steve told me was to keep it primitive. My brother's totally opposite, he's real modern, so we go for a kind of primitive modernism. If I had my way everything would be old-fashioned, but that's self-indulgent. Seasick's right, but we have to make it current enough to interest people right now.'

It can take some a lifetime to truly 'find' their musical voice, but sometimes an extended trip round the houses brings you right back where you started, with fresh ears. 'It's so true. My father used to tell me that roots music is mature music, and it's a great thing to be able to grow into it. It's interesting because now punk, rock and rap is 20, 30, 40 years old – to me it's all folk music in its own way. In the past the songwriting has led me astray time after time, but this record was like a zeitgeist record where it all came ➔

Gibson's Luther Dickinson ES-335

Dickinson has recently been awarded a Gibson signature-model ES-335 – you'll find our review on page 44 – and it's a thing of beauty. 'When it came to that guitar we wanted to make it as close to the ES-330 as we could, so we got the P90s and the Bigsby – a Ry Cooder influence – and when I finally got my hands on one I was like: "This is it!" It responds just like an acoustic, especially if you turn it down just a little bit.

'We're experimenting with less dense blocks on the inside to keep the foundation but make it even more resonant. They're doing that right now, and I think that's very exciting. It's hum-cancelling in the middle too – that's genius, 'cos sometimes P90s are too noisy. They copied the finish of my dad's 1951 ES-175, which is beautiful, and that made me real happy too. It's a dream come true. I can't even believe that it's a reality.'

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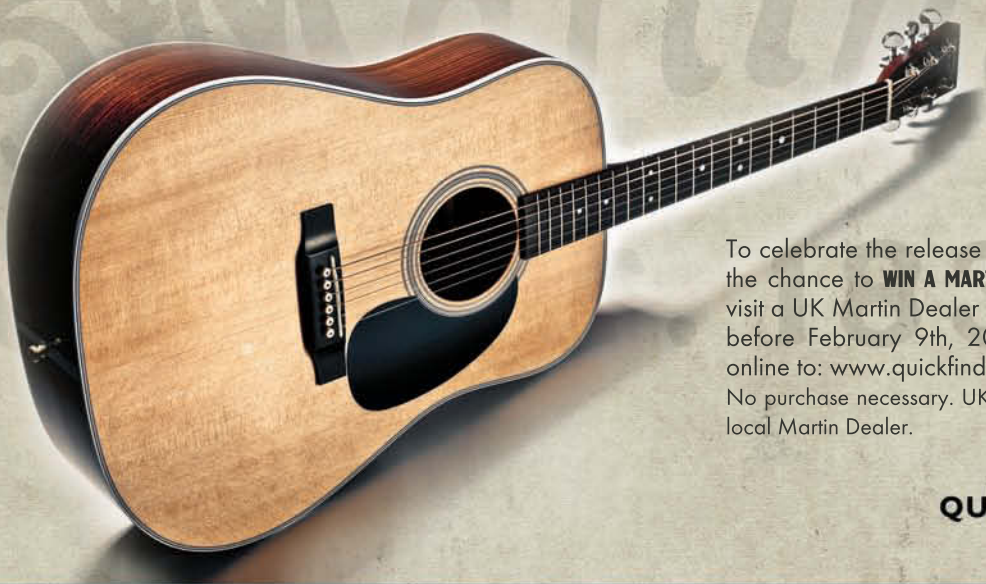

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Photo: Jay Adkins

Cody and Luther Dickinson: 'Our father taught us to mix the new and the old'

Listen up

NORTH MISSISSIPPI ALLSTARS

Shake Hands With Shorty
(2000)
Nominated for 'Best Contemporary Album' at the Grammys, this is the bristling set of explosive electric hill country blues that put NMA on the map

NORTH MISSISSIPPI ALLSTARS

World Boogie Is Coming
(2013)
Luther and his brother Cody marry old vibes with new techniques for a masterclass in primitive modernism via reimagined covers and dusky originals

together. After the first record we lost our way, we were touring the world and we became uprooted, so in a way this is like our second album – all the records in between are just snapshots.'

With Seasick's encouragement, NMA are right where the world needs them: a finely-tuned springboard for taking the blues forward. However, the original inspiration was a humble diddleybow.

'It's what started the whole project. We were doing a record store show and a friend of mine, Scott Baxendale, who makes guitars, handed me this instrument. I tuned it up and started playing *Rollin' And Tumblin'* – that's the diddleybow song on the album. We've done it at every show since and it became a highpoint of the set. Cody said, "That's it! That's what we need to do!" It's the perfect primitive-modern song – a coffee-can diddleybow through octave and distortion pedals.'

'In a way, this is our second record. All the others in between are just snapshots'

There's an inter-generational feel to the song choice too. '*Goin' To Brownsville* was a tribute to Furry Lewis and the Memphis side,' explains Luther. 'My father and his friend learned it from Furry and we learned it from them. Our parents were Memphians, so that's a nod to that tradition.'

The album features a clutch of originals (look out for *Turn Up Satan*) and covers including Otha Turner, Bukka White, Willie Dixon, Kimborough and RL Burnside, whose *Snake Drive* is a electrifying moment with octave-infused guitars, effects-drenched washboard, some fun with a pickup switch and a whole lot of space to manoeuvre.

'I'm glad the space was maintained because *Snake Drive* has over 100 tracks on it! It's totally indulgent, but a lot of the rest of the album is very stripped down. Cody had his way with his part of everything – a real modern technique – but my thing was really live. Our father taught us to combine the new and the old – it is a digital world, after all.'

NMA's blend of Cody's future-minded approach juxtaposed with Luther's old-school energy led to an inspired noise – forget the dead, sterile studio environment so common amongst today's musicians.

'It was just a real open recording. We had a window open with a mic outside. If it was raining we would mic the rain; if there was a windstorm we'd turn on the wind mic. We also just let people talk. We were also trying to be cinematic, because Cody was making films to go along with it. We wanted to have segues, so we would just improvise for a few moments before and after almost every song. This is the first time that we just invited everybody in and said, "Come on, just do your thing." In the past every record's been: lock the door, here's a new song, it goes like this – and that's where we've been going wrong.'

Together with his brother Luther is taking the field holler into the future with a new narrative that's impossible to resist. But it isn't just the original blues artists that matter to the equation, as an elite group of modern pioneers also played a part.

'Seasick introduced me to Jack White, who I admire greatly. He's a master when it comes to stylistic precision. Whatever project he's in, he keeps it within those parameters. There's total freedom in limitations, and he's been a great example for me.

'Also, we're fortunate enough to live in the era of Derek Trucks. He's one of those very special musicians. I love how he has extended the vernacular of slide guitar so wide. When I first saw him aged 14 he was playing Coltrane, then he studied Indian music and then sacred steel, like Robert Randolph. Now when young players listen to Derek, they hear that phrasing and intonation.'

The album is played predominantly on a new Gibson ES-330 reissue – again chosen to maintain their manifesto.

'The whole thing about North Mississippi is that even RL Burnside had his electric rock'n'roll band, but I love the acoustic stuff – very intricate and powerful fingerpicking. I wanted to play acoustic country blues really loud. What I'm trying to do is to get an electric guitar to respond like an acoustic. I grew up with an Epiphone Casino and my father's 1951 ES-175. Though jazz hollowbodies are perfect, they feed back at higher volumes. Then my friends at Gibson let me borrow the new 330, and I just fell in love – that's the guitar on *World Boogie*. It's fully hollow and it's got the P90s, it just sounds so good.'

Instruments, feel, musicians... Luther Dickinson is all about representing Mississippi and hill country blues right now. 'It's an ancient thing, man. Music is such a beautiful communicator. It's like science and art, nature and spirituality. So much rock'n'roll and traditional blues is existential – you just sit there, watch it and appreciate it, but Junior, RL and Otha were like chiefs of their tribes. Wherever they played, they had that vibe. It was about the whole mood, and that's what we try and do: break down those boundaries and take everybody to that place. There's so much bad music that's called "the blues" these days. I'm done with that. I don't know what all that other noise is, but this is modern-made blues right here... and this is what's happening in Mississippi right now.'

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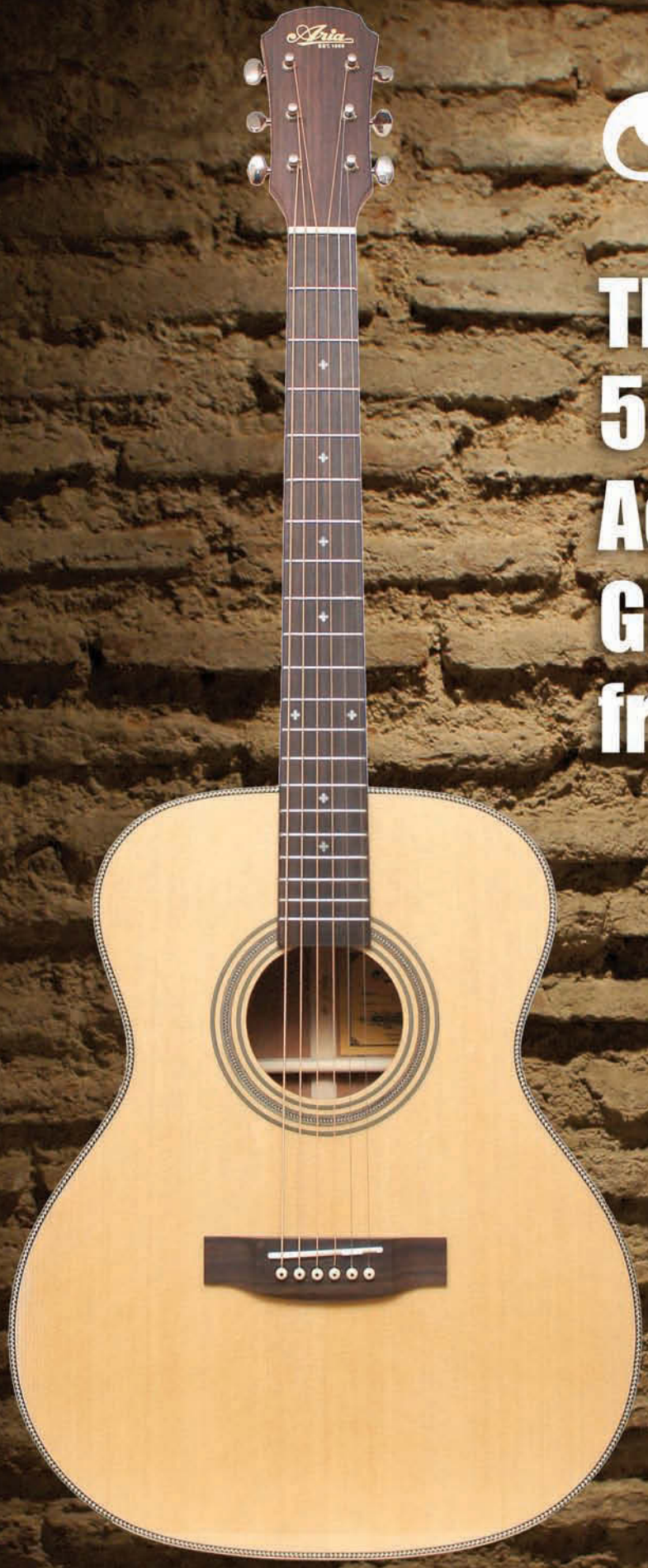

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Flying Colours

With his Temple Of Rock project building nicely and new album *Bridging The Gap* in the can, Michael Schenker lifts the lid on his brand of hard-hitting melodic rock. Interview by **Rik Flynn**

Gear

Guitars
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Integrity, individuality, originality. Pretty much every artist in the history of rock'n'roll has alluded to this holy trinity at some point in their career and most go to great lengths to ensure we know they hold their principles in high regard. Words are, however, a country mile away from actions, and it goes without saying that a fair proportion of these artists are telling porkies (punk diehards prancing around selling car insurance and butter, anyone?). Monetary persuasion may lead to acquiescence in weaker-minded individuals, but not in the case of the award-winning guitarist Michael Schenker. Here we have a purist who takes the trinity pretty damn seriously... so much so that, as a teenager, Schenker made the decision to banish the music of all others from his earshot. Nothing was going to tempt him away from the creative straight and narrow. He chose this path not to be arrogant, nor because he doesn't like other artists' music; quite the contrary – he chose this path to steadfastly maintain his own unaffected voice. While Michael is clearly a fan of black (his car is black, his clothes are black, his bags are black), the man himself is far from dark-minded, and spends a large proportion of our sit-down discussing the power of an individual in terms of his or her own unique 'colours'. Black on the outside, technicolour on the inside.

'At 17 I already knew that I had to stay away from music because I wanted to create, not consume. You can use stuff that's already out there or you can use the infinite inner source of creativity. Nobody can express your colour. It's like a kaleidoscope – you shake it and there's always another combination. There's a lot of stuff out there that I would love to listen to, but it's not my assignment in this life. You get tempted into doing things because they sound so cool, but that person's already done it. There is no music theory for me either. It's just what I hear. If you get attached to somebody else's thing until you can play it without thinking, then it imprints and you can't let go of it.'

Schenker's self-control extends far beyond his listening habits and his playing style. His chosen tone was born of a similar ethos, reached impartially via a technique that dispensed of subconscious brand manipulation.

'People talk to me about cables, amplifiers and guitars, but I know nothing. I was looking for a new pickup and I didn't want to be blinded by the names. My guitar tech had a way to change them over quickly so I played with my eyes closed and tried about 10, and I picked EMG and Schaller in the end. You have to stay away from the brand and have an honest opinion based on what you actually like. We have our own versions of what kind of sound and melodies we like, whether we want to play fast or slow, how emotionally we play, rhythm... combine it all together and then you can fun for the rest of your life.'

It is perhaps down to these unshakable ethics that the 'Mad Axeman' has very much remained a wanderer of musical plains, never settling in one place too long. Beginning with the Scorpions, he went on to spend six years with UFO, briefly returned to the Scorpions for the *Lovedrive* album and eventually went solo with ↦

'I knew I had to stay away from music because I wanted to create, not consume'

the Michael Schenker Group. In between all that he turned down auditions with the Rolling Stones, Ozzy Osbourne, Aerosmith and Deep Purple – opportunities few would be able to resist. 'I was always very tempted,' he says. 'But I couldn't sit there in the machine playing other people's songs.' Since 2011 he has masterminded his current project, Temple Of Rock.

'I went all the way to the top with UFO. In fact I got scared when *Lights Out* made it big. I ran away, then came back a little while longer until I left. I did *Lovedrive* to help the Scorpions out. It looked like I was going to join, but I knew that was not the right place for me. I just finished with UFO, so why would I? I wasn't interested in that level of fame. For me it was the satisfaction from music itself and experimenting.

SCHENKER INVENTS THE HOWLER

Schenker isn't just a player – he also has a penchant for dreaming up ideas, and one of them is the bizarre, round plectrum-like object he calls the Howler. 'I was walking with my fiancée in Brighton three years ago and I told her I have this thing in my head – I can't see it, but I can hear it. I went home and looked for the pieces I needed, and it worked!

'It's similar to a slide , but it's not – it comes from a whole different area and it only works in a certain way. I started playing around with it and I found different combinations – you can't really play songs with it, but you can make really interesting sounds and noises that give a little bit of a spark, like a slide or a wah-wah, just to add some colour. It's like my greeting! I howl and the people howl back! I used it on *Temple Of Rock* on a song called *Miss Claustrophobia*... it sounds like a howl. On the new album, though, I was so focussed on the recording that I completely forgot to use it...'

'It seems like my part is three basic steps: one, focussing on that great fascination with the guitar and becoming a great guitarist; the next is pure self-expression. Then, when I did MSG, it was just experimenting with all sorts of different things. I couldn't have done it with the touring machine – album, tour, album, tour. I just needed my freedom, my own pace and I needed to develop as a person.'

Temple Of Rock is yet another phase, and Schenker is surveying the history of music in order to crown his concept of 'handmade rock'.

'Zeppelin, Deep Purple, Black Sabbath... they laid the foundation, and then the pillars came in the '70s with UFO, Judas Priest, Rush and AC/DC and so on. Then in the '80s the bricks and the clay, and now we are getting to the roof. My father was an engineer and every time he finished a house he had a party before they put the roof on, and that's what I'm doing. I'm celebrating the roofing of the era of the temple of handmade rock! 400 years from now this time will stick out as a moment that was very creative and had a very big impact. Gary Moore is dead, Alvin Lee, John Lord, Ronnie James Dio... one of these days all that's going to be left is the recordings. So that's why I called it Temple Of Rock.'

For the band's 2011 debut Schenker called upon vocalist/producer Michael Voss and decided it was due time to reunite his *Lovedrive* rhythm section of Scorpions drummer Herman Rarebell and bassist Francis Buchholz; it was the first time the trio had played together since '79. 'It's a funny thing,' Schenker reflects. 'After so many years, it was like nothing had happened. If you have the chemistry, you never lose it.'

The debut also called upon a very different talent. 'It was the weirdest thing,' he recalls. 'Michael did a really good voiceover intro and I wanted to find a famous actor with a cool voice to do it. A few days later I get a call: "Would you like to play on William Shatner's album?" And I was like "No way! That's the guy we need!' Unbelievable, it's like he heard me!'

So with Shatner's unmistakable timbre cut onto the record, Temple Of Rock was complete and with a renewed energy Schenker and his new line-up speedily recorded the superb live DVD, *Temple Of Rock*, that combined an intimate show in Tilburg with their electric High Voltage Festival performance in London.

When the touring came to an end in October 2012, it was time for a follow-up. Voss had since signed a solo deal, so Scottish vocal powerhouse and ex-Rainbow singer Doogie White – who had done the European leg of the tour – took over on vocal duties and added his writing talents to the project. *Bridge The Gap*, their latest 13-track rock extravaganza was born.

Schenker's technique for his side of the writing was to collect a sort of 'riff bank'. 'I play and discover things and when I bump into something I like, I switch on the tape recorder. I don't get tempted to listen to any of it, I just put it away. Eventually I see the tape's getting small and I know I've recorded quite a few things, then I choose what inspires me.'

Obviously the lead spots are a focus for Michael and tracks like *When The Wind Blows* and *Lord Of The Lost And Lonely* illustrate his sizzling frettery with solo passages that fire off on exhilarating tangents. Any favourite moments? ➔

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Listen up

UFO
Lights Out
(1977) Chrysalis
UFO's sixth and most successful album was stocked with rich strings and features classic tracks *Getting' Ready* and *Love To Love*, both co-written by Schenker and vocalist Phil Mogg

SCORPIONS
Lovedrive
(1979) Harvest/EMI
After UFO, Schenker briefly re-joined the German hard-rockers for this critically acclaimed LP – an album that lifted Scorpions profile, fared well in the charts and eventually reached gold status

MICHAEL SCHENKER'S TEMPLE OF ROCK
Bridging The Gap
(2013) in-akustik
Scorpions' rhythm section reunites with MS on this explosive rock album, bristling with solos and Doogie White's full-bodied rock pipes

And another thing...

Aged just 15, Michael played on the first Scorpions LP. It was produced by Conny Plank, who went on to work with Can and Kraftwerk and had a big influence on David Bowie and Brian Eno

Yin, yang and the man: Schenker with Dean V

'For me an album starts and finishes, there are no songs. The lead break is always a special event. I go on a journey. It's almost like walking through land with a hill coming and then a waterfall – you're seeing different things. When you've got to the other side you ask: "What was your favourite moment?" Well, I liked the waterfall... but the sunny beach was great too.'

For a man who has a yin and yang tattoo on his arm and a guitar that carries the famous Chinese philosophical icon too, balance obviously has an important part to play in the writing process.

'Since 2007 I've been having fun on stage – I don't know why, but I hated it before. I realised it's a balance to keep it interesting. I made a decision to focus on fast, heavy, melodic, dramatic, a little bit of darkness, a little bit weird... then I put it together. To not have too much lead guitar and when to add something else to keep it interesting so that the intention is still there – it's something you can't explain.'

The completed new album led to yet more zen-like self-control, much to the dismay of his band. 'When Michael Voss said, "Right, that's it. We have to master it," we were already close to the first gig of the tour in Russia and I said to myself, "What am I going to do for the next seven months? I'm not going to wear this album out, so I have to put it away." I didn't even play it to the others because they would start nit-picking. I had to be strong. They were completely pissed off! When you're in it you lose perspective, but towards the end of our tour I finally decided it was okay to listen to it and we looked at it collectively and it really worked.'

Seven-string is slowly becoming a more important presence, and Schenker's long-time guitarist and keyboardist Wayne Findlay does a fine job with it. *Bridge The Gap*'s crushing detuned opener *Neptune Rising* illustrates the reasons perfectly. It also seems a likely vehicle for future riffs – a 'Neptune' V is in the design phase at Dean. 'A few years ago I played a Flying V seven-string, but Wayne took over and I started hearing great things in soundcheck. I want to use the seven-string more on the next album – put everybody in the same room and write together from the beginning. The seven-string makes it all a little more modern, and Dean are designing one for him.'

The Flying V is of course synonymous with Schenker, and he's been fascinated ever since his brother introduced one to him as a teenager – so why no Gibson signature?

'The Gibson V is what was imprinted to everybody, but in 2004 Dean himself came and asked me to try a guitar and I liked it. He made a very good offer and on my first solo tour I had 10 Dean guitars straight from the factory with no problems. With Gibson I remember many times when various things would be wrong with them. My Dean sings all the way up – there are no weak spots – and they don't break; I have broken so many Gibsons! I don't want to badmouth Gibson, but Dean came at the right time and I've stayed with them ever since.'

> *'Since 2007 I've been having fun on stage. I don't know why, but I hated it before'*

Schenker is also renowned for his personalised midrange wah tone – something he's returned to of late.

'I discovered there were certain frequencies that I hated and I opened it up and locked it in position so every time I had that nasal, but really sweet tone. Then I started to hate the sound. All the old British wah-wahs were starting to break down and sounding worse and worse. Then recently the Dunlop Dimebag came out, and it's the greatest wah.'

As the tattoo, the thoughtful metaphors and the philosophical chat reveal, here is a man who thinks deeply about his purpose on the planet and the part it plays in his music. 'I think my life has been upside down. Now, it's about the band. I'm more or less fulfilled with the freedom that I had and I'm realising that there could be a much deeper spectrum of creativity that's about complementing each other.

'For instance, my brother was born in the year of the rat; I'm a horse. Phil Mogg [UFO] and Klaus Meine [Scorpions] are rats. We're opposite – they don't even marry in China. Then I found out Doogie's a rat too! People say you can't buy a book on how to be successful but maybe it's a possible with a rat and horse! Maybe we'll get a pig and a tiger involved too...'

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Photos: Mike Prior

Gold Record

Seeking a mythical garage blues experience? Aaron Moreland of bass-free trio Moreland & Arbuckle meets **Steve Bailey** to talk of bottlenecks and the fabled plunk of a cigarbox guitar

Wichita, set on the great plains of the midwest, was once the fabled 'Cowtown' where rag-tail bands of cowboys drove their cattle up from the south to meet the railroad. The city's colourful history goes right back to the conquistadors when one Francisco Vasquez De Coronado took his expedition to the site hoping he'd discover the rumoured 'seven cities of gold'. Unfortunately for him, there was no gold... and all he found was a small tribe of Native Americans known as the Wichita.

Fast-forward to 2014 and the city is an industrial hub, world famous for the manufacturing aeroplanes, yet perhaps an echo of that history somehow still lingers. Wichita outfit Moreland & Arbuckle certainly seem to have captured some hard-bitten, gutsy, devil-may-care attitude in their rootsy, driving country-blues. Gallant facial fuzz gives them the look of having just stepped off a cattle drive, and their latest album *7 Cities* explores Kansas folklore in regard to Señor Coronado. Throw in some blues harp, a souped-up cigarbox guitar and some emotionally-charged Delta mojo and you have a compelling package.

Aaron Moreland was a fairly typical American teenager who grew up on the classic rock radio that rules the airwaves in the US. As with most, the likes of Led Zep and Deep Purple were the inspiration for his first steps on the electric guitar, but when he stumbled over the haunting, early sounds of the Delta, something in him shifted.

'I was about 22 years old when I first heard *Death Letter* by Son House... it changed everything,' Moreland states. I got deep into that pre-war blues stuff – Son House, Robert Johnson, Bukka White. I saved my money and bought a Nashville resonator guitar. I took it and I ran. That guitar changed my life. I completely abandoned electric guitar for six years. It changed the way I thought about playing guitar.'

In 2001 Moreland left his home town of Emporia just to the north of Wichita and travelled to the big city armed with his trusty resonator. A chance meeting at an open mic session with vocalist and blues harp player Dustin Arbuckle led to the pair both playing in the same blues-rock bar band.

It wasn't long before they realised they shared a musical vision. They formed a four-piece, initially dubbed the Kingsnakes, that blended Mississippi blues with 'sludgy rock jams'; sadly the outfit couldn't keep hold of a bassist or indeed a drummer. Things came to a head a couple of years later.

'After our second bass player left we just thought, you know what, there's some cool bands out there that don't have bass players... we can do this,' Moreland relates. 'On a lot of that old blues, there's no bass – electric bass didn't even exist. Hound Dog Taylor was a huge influence. He played those cheap Teiscos but his tone was awesome and I love his rhythm guitar player Brewer Philips. He played all the bass lines on the Telecaster so that got me thinking "Hey, this is cool hell!" Now everything I do is rhythmic. People say "Where's your bass player?" and I always show them my thumb.'

> *'People say "Where's your bass player?" and I always show them my thumb'*

These days the band have taken on a permanent drummer in Kendall Newby, but at the beginning their sound was simply Moreland's resonator and Arbuckle's harp. They adopted the Moreland & Arbuckle name in 2005, and soon after that added a cigarbox guitar.

'We were playing a show out in the street in 2006 at a big event called the King Biscuit Festival in Helena, Arkansas,' explains Aaron. 'This guy comes up and starts talking to me, and he had a cigarbox guitar ➔

Aaron Moreland, Randall Newby (drums) and Dustin Arbuckle (vocals/harmonica)

Gear

Guitars
Cigarbox guitar with separate bass string output, Gibson The Paul, Les Paul Special, '56 Goldtop reissue, 50th Anniversary Fender Telecaster, Nashville resonator

Amps
Vox AC30, 1968 Ampeg Jet, Fender 5E3 clone

Effects
Danelectro echo

Moreland travels light – no amps and three guitars. L-R: Gibson The Paul (aka Teresa), the Mike Schneider cigarbox, and his '96 LP Special

with a bass guitar string. I was like, wow, this is so cool, I'd love to buy one. He said, "I love your music... I'll just make you one." It was total luck.'

The guy in question was Mike Schneider, known to some as Memphis Mike, an aeroplane mechanic who liked to build the occasional cigarbox guitar as a hobby. 'When I picked that thing up I could just play it immediately. It was a perfect fit for the way I'd taught myself to play guitar. The bass string has its own pickup and jack socket, so it can be split with a push-pull pot and go into a bass amp. The three guitar strings feed out to a guitar amp. You can run everything into a guitar amp if you want to, but that bottom end is gone.'

'The cigarbox guitar really does drive your creativity and challenges how well you play'

The cigarbox: note the twin jack sockets and the push-pull pot

The sound of Moreland's fingerstyle string-wrangling is huge, and the cigarbox has become a vital part of the Moreland & Arbuckle signature bombast, particularly live. Schneider has made Moreland several variations, but he's still attached to the first two off the bench.

'The first one is great, but the second is the nicest. It's one of those things where I'm the only person who notices the difference, but as a guitar player the way something feels and sounds to you really does drive your creativity and challenges how well you play. The top is starting to get a hole in it... it's gonna end up looking like Willie Nelson's guitar!'

Moreland's playing style is fierce; his instruments take punishment and his fingers even more so, especially as he favours strings like skipping ropes.

'I tune to AAEA just to get that power chord in the middle. I've played around with a lot of different gauges to get the best string combination. I used to use a 0.075" or an 0.080" on the bass string; a 0.016" on what would be the G string was too heavy but a 0.014" was too light, so I got a 0.015". You can't find a 15, it's a weird gauge, so I just order them off the internet. Now I use a 0.065", a 0.032", a 0.015", and 0.012". I have a heavy touch. I've learned the hard way that these strings can tear up my fingers.'

There was a point in 2010 in the middle of a tour where three of Moreland's nails completely broke up. Being a burly Kansas native, when a friend suggested fake nails were the way to go he wasn't convinced it was for him, but things got desperate.

'I was like, what am I gonna do? How am I gonna fix this problem? I got up early one morning after a gig and found a nail salon in the middle of Kentucky. I'm gonna tell you what, the women hate it when they see a man come into a nail salon. It's sort of like an all-women's club. If looks could have killed, I'd have been dead a hundred times!'

The process involves sanding your nails down to make them very coarse so the new fake ones adhere, but fortunately they can be cut to look completely genuine. Aaron declined any offers of fancy decoration. 'At first I thought it was gonna be great, but they wore down pretty quick. Every 10 to 12 days I had to have them redone, and because of the sanding my nails just got so thin they were like sheets of paper. But I was stuck. It was a bad cycle to be on.'

After Aaron had spent the best part of a year frequenting nail bars and showering his guitar with fake nail dust, the band took a break in their busy touring schedule in 2011. The plan was to record the *Just A Dream* album, and Aaron was able grow his nails out. 'I could still play for a while but you could feel them start to burn. It took four months for them to get back to normal. I had to do something at the time, but it was the biggest mistake I ever made. If it starts happening now I'll just back off to preserve them. It's like a vocalist screaming every night – at some point they're gonna blow their voice out.'

Mike Schneider suggested that smooth flatwound strings might help, and it proved to be a good call. 'The two wound strings on there are now flatwounds, and I think it's solved the problem. It's definitely made my hands more durable.'

Although the cigarbox guitar is a live staple, it's not always used. 'The thing is, there's no frets on it, and the way it's tuned you can't get chord voicings... everything's up and down,' Aaron points out. When it comes to recording regular guitars have always featured ➔

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heavily, bringing a vital blues-rock element. On the new album *7 Cities* only *Tall Boogie* and *Road Blind* get the cigarbox treatment; for the remainder standard electrics dominate, with his old resonator only coming out for one track, *Red Bricks*.

For the most part Aaron is a Gibson Les Paul man, but his mainstay is an unusual member of the family. 'I've got a couple of The Pauls, which are like a poor man's Les Paul, made from solid walnut,' he explains. 'I found my first one at a local music store when I was 16 years old. I only paid $400 for it, and it was my first good electric guitar. For me it just seems to have a bigger, bassier tone. I actually played it so much that I wore both pickups out over the years. I replaced them with '59 reissues and they sound fantastic.'

After an airline sent his precious The Paul off to a completely different part of the county to the band, Moreland decided it was time to buy a spare to travel with. 'It was fine, I got it back and I still gig regularly with it at home, but I decided I was never checking that guitar on a flight again. It's only probably worth $1000, but sentimentally it couldn't be replaced.'

As a token of his affection both The Pauls have been christened; the original is known as Bonnie and the second is Teresa. He has an SG, but that's also a guitar that doesn't travel. 'It's cool-sounding, but I've never had to re-set the intonation or have the neck adjusted so much as on an SG... those thin necks!'

A 1996 Les Paul Special is currently Aaron's perfect touring tool. 'I've had that thing maybe a year – the best $750 I've ever spent. I found exactly the one I wanted, a red one with the cool double cutaway. It's a great guitar. It's pretty versatile, plays really good, sounds good and holds up well on the road.'

The Special is a good live stand-in for the '56 reissue Goldtop that features heavily on *7 Cities*, while a 50th Anniversary Tele reissue also played a part. 'It's a Japanese-made Fender, a really nice guitar. The problem for me is if I'm playing live with a Gibson and then I plug in the Tele I've gotta turn my amp up 50 per cent more, because the single-coils are just not as hot. I love it, but for what I do I just prefer Gibsons.'

In terms of strings Aaron's regular electrics are fitted out in a similarly bold fashion to his cigarbox. 'I used to play with mega-huge guitar strings on the E, B and G – 0.014", 0.018" and 0.024" –but there were times when I had to play a lead and I couldn't do it because they were too heavy. After that, I went down to a 0.012", 0.016" and 0.020" [his wound strings remained 0.028", 0.038" and 0.048"]. I can't believe that some guys play with 0.08"s or 0.09"s. I'm sure I would break them, and I think you would sacrifice tone.'

Any overdrive, distortion or other effect heard on the album all comes straight from his amps – and he took a full dozen along with him for the recording.

'Some of it's a '68 Ampeg Jet, some of it's through a 5E3 clone – a Fender Tweed Deluxe copy. It's all just regular tube amps. What surprised the hell outta me amp-wise was the AC30; it's all over this record, and you can really hear it on *The Devil In Me*. I almost didn't take it. It's a brand new one. I love the chime of it.'

Moreland almost exclusively favours open G and open D, and *The Devil In Me* is one of the few songs on the record in standard tuning. 'Sometimes I'll tune down to D minor, occasionally G minor, but I've never done much else. I have this plain old metal slide, and then I have one that's brass. There's no rhyme or reason... I just have them on my amp and I'll just pick one up. I don't notice a huge difference in sound. I used to use a real thick-walled pinky glass slide, but while we were making a record back in 2007 I picked up a brass slide and I was like, wow, this sounds so much better. I stopped playing glass at that moment.'

> *'I don't like pedals. I just can't figure them out. I don't want to fiddle with knobs'*

When playing live Aaron's not too fussy about amps, especially when travelling outside the US, and he's confident he can get a good sound through any backline provided, utilising both the bass amp and the guitar amp for his cigarbox. Apart from an occasional bit of Danelectro echo, pedals are eschewed too. 'I don't like pedals, man... they suck my tone away. Some guys can play with 10 pedals and they've got the best tone ever. I just can't figure them out. I want to play guitar, I don't want to fiddle with knobs! It gives you a lot of different options, but to me it becomes overwhelming.'

That's all well and good because Moreland & Arbuckle bring you stripped-down raucous blues, rock and Americana in need of little embellishment. It's pure, elemental and intensely powerful. The legend of Coronado preaches that there's no gold to be found in Wichita – but we would beg to differ.

Listen up

MORELAND & ARBUCKLE
7 CITIES
(2013)
There's a slicker production than we've become accustomed to on M&A's latest, but the band's inherent grit'n'grind still anchors another rootsy triumph

MORELAND & ARBUCKLE
Flood
(2010)
The fourth M&A LP, but the first to get a full UK release, this crashed into our hearts like a freight train with everything from Delta stomps to stunning blues rock

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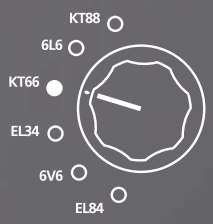

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GIBSON

Luther Dickinson ES-335

Take two great Gibson elements, the centre-block ES-335 and the snarly P90, marry them together, and you've got one of the more compelling signature models of recent times. Review by **Marcus Leadley**

We tend to forget that many of Gibson's classic designs of the 1950s were solutions to the real-world problem of feedback; bigger gigs, more powerful amps and the onset of rock'n'roll meant it was a serious issue for the jazz box designs of the 1930s and '40s. Les Paul's solidbody model of 1952 nailed the problem, but it was a radical solution, and for pro players used to a rich, warm hollowbody tone, Les Pauls were not the answer.

Midway though the '50s, the thinline ES-225 was introduced. The theory was simple – enough body space to create a semi-acoustic character but with a smaller resonant chamber, giving less feedback potential. The idea worked to a degree, and it subsequently led to the slimline ES-330 design of 1958. These were great in the studio and for mid-sized club gigs, but it was the ES-335, introduced in the same year, that delivered the right balance of tone, playability and control. It did this by combining hollow and solidbody characteristics with a solid maple block running all the way from the front of the guitar to the back, stiffening the top and dividing the body cavity into two smaller, unconnected chambers.

It was feedback control that initially drew Luther Dickinson to the ES-335; his North Mississippi Allstars play loud. He loved the ES-175 he inherited from his father Jim Dickinson, former guitarist with the Dixie Flyers, session musician and producer, but the 175 simply could not cope. The solution was a Gibson Memphis ES-335 kitted out to look and sound like dad's ES-175.

The finish is modelled on Dickinson Sr's ES-175 and then VOS aged all over

The machineheads are Klusons with single-ring plastic 'tulip' buttons

The North Mississippi Allstars play loud: the solution was a 335 kitted out to look and sound like Dickinson's father's 175

This is one lovely-looking electric guitar. The nitrocellulose finish is a late '50s vintage brown/tobacco burst and the aged cream body binding frames it beautifully. Like all 335s the body is made from laminated maple, but the centre block is a single piece. The neck is quarter-sawn mahogany and the 22-fret rosewood fingerboard is bound to match the body. The dot position markers are period-correct to the late 1950s. Everything from the Klusons and the headstock inlay to the amber-top control knobs and the Bigsby vibrola tells you this is a class act.

At the same time, this guitar is not a normal 335 reissue. The basic 335 always has humbuckers; this one sports dogear P90s. This is Dickinson's principal request, as the ES-175 was introduced soon after the end of ➔

FACTFILE

GIBSON LUTHER DICKINSON ES-335

DESCRIPTION **Semi-hollow electric guitar. Made in USA**
PRICE **£2299**

BUILD **Twin chamber semi-hollow body made from a maple/poplar/maple laminate. Mahogany set neck (mortise and tenon) with maple spline. 12" radius, 22-fret bound rosewood fingerboard with pearloid dot markers. Aged cream body binding (top and back). Corian nut, nickel hardware, Kluson tuners, ABR Tune-O-Matic bridge, aluminium Bigsby B7 vibrola tailpiece**
ELECTRICS **Two Gibson P90 Alnico II single coil pickups, independent tone and volume controls, three-way pickup selector**
LEFT-HANDERS **No**
FINISH **Jim Dickinson burst**

SCALE LENGTH
24.75"/629mm
NECK WIDTH
Nut 43.8mm
12th fret 51.8mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 21.6mm
12th fret 24.8mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 36mm
Bridge 52mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 1.8mm
12th fret bass 2mm
WEIGHT **8lbs/3.63kg**

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ES-335 Dot
The regular vintage 335 reissue from Gibson Memphis with humbuckers and a stoptail bridge
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Duesenberg
Fullerton CC Eagle
Built from maple laminate with a central sustain block, this boasts a P90 at the neck and a humbucker at the bridge to give the best of both worlds. Duesenberg Deluxe tremolo also fitted
RRP **£2695**

Epiphone
Riviera Custom P-93
Maple laminate body with mahogany centre block and a Bigsby. For P90s you'll need to go for this custom model, and it has three! It's a good way into the vintage semi-acoustic feel and sound on a budget
RRP **£369**

WW2 with P90 single coils, the standard Gibson pickup until the introduction of the humbucker in 1957. P90s deliver a clean, bright tone and convey a good deal of the guitar's natural acoustic character. The midrange is quite prominent, which works famously for biting lead tones, and there's plenty of gutsy crunch on offer; however, they're susceptible to mains hum and need to be paired with a good amp for their sound to be properly showcased.

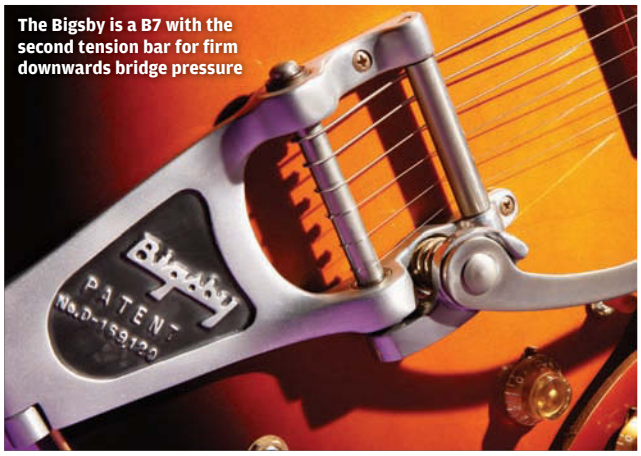
The neck is a peach, copied directly from the vintage ES-175. It's a little fuller than a '60s slim taper, but not really chunky. Add a 12" radius board, medium-gauge frets and the easy feel afforded by the 24.75" Gibson scale and you've got a responsive, easy-playing guitar. It balances perfectly on a strap but, surprisingly, it's unbalanced on the knee; there's too much weight at the tail and gravity tends to carry it backwards.

Sounds

The acoustic tone rings out nicely, with surprisingly forward mids and a dry honkiness to the sound that favours the pick edge. Dickinson says his playing style is based on translating acoustic technique to the electric ('really loud electric guitar. Loud but clean'), and his go-to sound is the middle position with both pickups on – so let's start there.

In this mode the pickups are noise-cancelling. The clean sound is rounded and warm and yes, it sounds a lot like the acoustic tone, but the lows are restrained and the top end is rounded out. It's nothing like that quintessential out-of-phase Knopfler Strat quack, but some of the same characteristics are present and to my mind it has many more uses. Here the highs are sweet but not biting, while the neck pickup is where you go if you want to explore the deeper end of the guitar; for upper-mid honk, switch down to the bridge.

It soon becomes apparent that the best way to play this guitar is to turn everything on the amp up full, use the tone controls subtractively to get your basic sound right, and then control everything from the guitar in true vintage style. If it's too loud, use a smaller amp! Backing off the volume cleans things up beautifully and you can really make the amp crunch and splutter as it starts to distort.



The Bigsby is a B7 with the second tension bar for firm downwards bridge pressure

The bridge is a standard ABR, but you could retro-fit a roller bridge

You won't get smooth Larry Carlton, nor Alvin Lee, or BB King; the P90s give the guitar a much more gnarly edge

More gain brings out the rockier side of the blues. The guitar still has the underlying character of a 335 with a full, bassy twang but you won't get that super-smooth Larry Carlton thing or the Alvin Lee or BB King tones without humbuckers. The P90s give the guitar a much more gnarly edge, something ideally suited to a heavy-handed playing style with elements of John Lee Hooker or Otis Rush thrown in. Playing on the neck pickup with the guitar's tone fractionally wound off straight into a hot amp is fantastic fun that delivers a real sense of '70s blues rock perfection.

Dickinson plays fingerstyle most of the time and he's an aficionado of bottleneck and open tunings, so this 335 has to be able to cope with DADGAD, open C# and a bunch of other drop tunings. While he's essentially a blues player with many classic influences, there's a contemporary eclectic thread that reflects his upbringing. He's not afraid of weird-arse noise and cites the Cramps as a seminal influence – and this guitar can rise to the challenge. The feel is pretty loose to start with and the bass strings start flapping like rubber bands when you tune then down... and they sound seriously mean. At the risk of overworking the term 'authentic', that's the best way to describe the sound and feel when you get the bottleneck onto the strings, and if you want to push on through into feedback then the Bigsby really comes into its own because you can make the 335 rumble and wail. However, the bridge doesn't have roller saddles – the whole bridge articulates on its posts – so too much whammy use can put you out of tune very quickly.

Verdict

This is a really hard guitar to put down. It looks, feels and plays exactly like an instrument with an illustrious pedigree should; all the controls work brilliantly and you can work with them to sculpt great sounds as the P90s really bring out the acoustic character of the 335 platform. For controllable vintage blues it's a winner – and it can handle folk, rock, jazz, country and sonic explorations too. If you want to use a semi-acoustic in anger but humbuckers don't do it for you, it's an obvious solution. It's not cheap, but I'd quite happily slim down the collection of lesser name-brand guitars if it meant I could add one of these to the stable. The absence of any obvious Luther Dickinson branding is another plus: without having to state its signature connection too loudly, this is simply a great guitar in its own right.

FINAL SCORE

LUTHER DICKINSON ES-335	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Playability	**18**/20
Sound	**19**/20
Value for money	**17**/20
Vibe	**18**/20
TOTAL	**90%**

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The rear of the DOUBLE FOUR showing the RALFR Port Array

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Seymour Duncan

WASHBURN
Parallaxe PXM20FRFBCBM

The need for speed never goes away, and Washburn's latest lengthily-named offering is a piece of rock apparatus tuned for high performance from the ground up. Review by **Marcus Leadley**

While Washburn has produced a huge range of guitars over the years you'll probably associate the brand with either acoustics, which have been in production since 1883, or the rock instruments that first came along at the end of the 1970s. Washburn was an early adopter of the Floyd Rose and a champion of so-called super-Strat designs with their H/S/S pickup layouts. However, the company's commitment to the world of rock and metal has needed a refresh for a while now.

The new Parallaxe series might provide just that. There are three designs with different headstocks, configurations that offer Seymour Duncan or EMG pickups, Floyd Rose or hardtail bridges, and a range of body timbers. There are also seven-string and eight-string models.

True to Washburn form the models are designated by codes rather than names, so the model we have in on test is the PXM20FRFBCBM (we'll just call it the PXM20 for short). Most of the letters mean it's the Floyd Rose/Seymour Duncan version. It's a top of the line model, and Washburn has designed it for the serious shredder.

It's clear that the PXM20 isn't trying to reinvent a basic style, but a lot of thought has gone into tweaking individual features and these all add up to a major performance upgrade. The double-cut design hasn't changed much since the '80s but if you look closely at the delicate contours of the mahogany body, especially the arch of the top over which a flame maple veneer is applied, it's quite a work of art.

The Floyd Rose vibrato features a thicker brass sustain block

18:1 ratio Grover tuners with a gunmetal finish

The PXM20 is designed for the serious shredder, with many tweaks that add up to a major performance upgrade

The 24-fret set neck blends seamlessly into the body in a design that's referred to as a Stevens Extended Cutaway, and access all the way up to the second octave is great. All Parallaxe models feature an ebony fingerboard. Overall the neck feels great, and the matte finish is an improvement as it seems to give a better balance between traction and free motion. The string tension created by the 25.5" scale makes for a very crisp, snappy performance, while the super-smooth jumbo-size frets give you plenty of metal to bend against, making soloing a joyous experience.

FACTFILE

WASHBURN PARALLAXE PXM20FRFBCBM

DESCRIPTION
Solidbody electric guitar. Made in Indonesia
PRICE **£899**

BUILD **Mahogany body with flame maple veneer top, 24-fret full-access set neck with ebony fingerboard. Original Floyd Rose vibrato with 36mm sustain block and spring damping. Grover 18:1 tuners, Buzz Feiten tuning system**
ELECTRICS **Seymour Duncan Distortion humbucker (bridge) and Jazz humbucker (neck), three-position toggle switch, master tone and volume controls. Coil tap for single coil operation on tone and volume pots**
LEFT-HANDERS **No**
FINISH **Flame black, cherry burst**

SCALE LENGTH
25.5"/647mm
NECK WIDTH
Nut 42mm
12th fret 51.8mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 20.8mm
12th fret 22.2mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 34.2mm
Bridge 49.2mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 1.8mm
12th fret bass 2.2mm
WEIGHT **7lbs/3.18kg**

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RRP **£799**

ESP
Formula FR-II
Solid mahogany body, flame maple cap, through-neck construction, ebony fingerboard, Floyd Rose and Seymour Duncans
RRP **£2199**

Washburn guitars are all produced using the Buzz Feiten tuning system with a compensated nut to ensure pitch accuracy. After playing a wide range of fretted and open-string combinations we can attest to the fact that the intonation is almost spookily perfect.

The acoustic tone is bright and clear with a real piano-like character; natural sustain is also very good. On this score Washburn has upgraded the basic Floyd Rose design to include a 36mm brass block as a replacement for the standard 30mm steel one; more mass generally equals better sustain. The Floyd's springs are fitted with rubber damping strips so you don't get any creaks, rattles or reverberations as you whammy away or bang the guitar against your body as you leap about the stage. The Floyd is a masterpiece of design that works brilliantly, and for anyone who wants to do metal divebombing it really is the only practical option. People tend to forget, however, that it's also perfect for precise and nuanced bends. The main limitation of the design is the fact that you can't change tunings quickly.

While the PXM20's electrics are straightforward, the coil tap option activated by the push/pull tone and volume adds the flexibility of single coil tones to your palette. The choice of the basic Seymour Duncan Distortion unit for the bridge pickup makes a lot of sense: this is a tried and tested monster of tone. Equally, the slightly warmer Jazz version for the neck reflects the need of the more mature player who wants to pull a range of sounds from their guitar. Three-way switching ensures the PXM20 is a familiar ride.

Sounds

As the PXM20 is designed for metal we'll work backward toward the clean tones. It soon becomes apparent that it's a very flexible instrument. The world of high-gain sounds has a subtlety all its own and if you don't start with a strong, well-articulated signal and a relatively uncoloured tonal spectrum, shaping sound becomes a problem. Midrange mush or overly shrill highs can so often be a telltale sign of poorly-voiced, overpowered pickups.

Simple three-way switch plus push-pull Volume and Tone knobs for pickup coil-splitting

The pickups hold up really well with high-gain pedals and the clean capabilities are an unexpected bonus

These Seymour Duncans may be hot, but not at the expense of tone. Amplifier characteristics are extremely important here. For example, by switching from a vintage Marshall 100W to a Peavey 5150 you can get very close to early and mid-period Van Halen; staying with the Marshall and working the tone controls gives you a good approximation of a large variety of classic '70s Les Paul and SG rock sounds.

Pulling up on the pots for single coil operation makes thing much more Strat-like, although the sound of the guitar is quite different from a Fender so you won't be pensioning yours off just yet, and of course it doesn't have any in-between phase settings.

The PXM20 is very much at home driving digital gear, successfully bringing Kemper, Line 6 and Avid models to life. The pickups are super-clean, even in single coil mode, so the instrument is a brilliant tool for direct to computer recording. The sound also holds up extremely well with high-gain pedals, delivering solid, chunky chords with just the right amount of rip and zing and monster riffs that you can really hunker down into.

The clean capabilities of the PXM20 come as a pleasing and unexpected bonus. Even the bridge humbucker can deliver big, ringing chords and the neck pickup can even get funky. With the tone control fully wound off you can actually comp jazz chords and still hear the changes clearly. The guitar sustains forever; drench liberally with reverb and season with echo... lovely. Although you can feel the body resonate when you play, the tonal influence of the wood itself feels pretty minimal. The lock at the nut and the metallic mass of the Floyd Rose mean the tone has a very specific, bell-like character.

Verdict

With the exception of hollowbody tones, this PXM20FRFBCBM can capably cover the entire spectrum of the electric guitar repertoire. As such, it would be an ideal instrument for an advanced player looking to invest in one instrument to perform across a wide rage of styles – someone perhaps going away to university who can't be dragging a shedload of gear behind them. It's incredibly easy to play and light as a feather. The styling is fairly conservative, so it would be at home in pretty much any context... and, yes, it totally excels when it comes to hard and heavy rock, and eats just about every sort of metal for breakfast.

Seymour Duncan Jazz at the neck for warmer tones

FINAL SCORE

WASHBURN PARALLAXE PXM20FRFBCBM	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Playability	**18**/20
Sound	**18**/20
Value for money	**17**/20
Vibe	**18**/20
TOTAL	**89%**

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Gartone

GARTONE
Regal 15

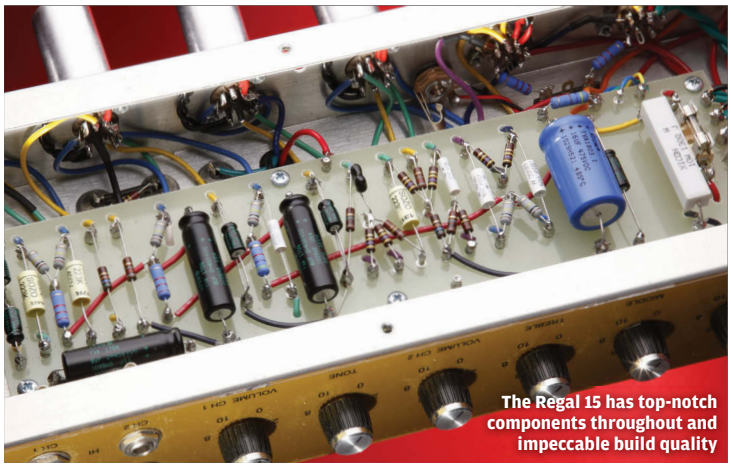
Born as a custom build for a client who wanted a British-voiced amp for smaller gigs with a low-power option for home use, the Regal 15 has now been added to Gartone's line up. Review by **Huw Price**

Many great amps have begun life as one-offs. In this case Martin Garton's brief was for an amp that would give British-flavoured sounds from two differently-voiced channels. It needed to work with both humbuckers and single-coils, and it had to have transformer-driven valve spring reverb on both channels. The result is the brand-new Gartone Regal 15.

According to Garton, the classic small British amp formula combines a low-gain preamp with an easy-to-overdrive output stage. On the Regal 15, the half-power triode setting allows you to get compressed and overdriven tones at lower levels, while full power pentode mode is loud enough for gigging.

Channel 1 has a single gain stage with Volume and a single Tone control before the phase inverter. Channel 2 is based on a 'Plexi' circuit, with controls numbering Volume, Treble, Middle and Bass. There are two gain stages, but no cathode follower. The power valves are cathode biased with no negative feedback. A 5Y3 rectifier tube is used rather than an EZ81 because of its more robust construction and the fact that it's less prone to microphonics.

The open-backed cabinet is made from 15mm birch ply, and onboard goodies include Mercury Magnetics transformers and a 25W Tayden alnico speaker. An angled plywood baffle is installed to deflect soundwaves away from the EL84s and prolong power valve life. Garton has constructed the circuit on glass epoxy turret board using selected high-end components and, as we have come to expect from this builder, the quality of the workmanship and finish is top notch.


The Regal 15 has top-notch components throughout and impeccable build quality

On the Gartone Regal 15 the brief to have different voicings for each channel has been met with spectacular success

Sounds

We're all accustomed to amps with a clean channel and one or more 'dirty' channels, but on the Regal 15 the brief to have different voicings for each channel has been met with spectacular success. Put simply, Channel 1 sounds like a non-Top Boost Vox and Channel 2 sounds just like a Marshall without tinnitus-inducing volume levels.

If you've ever had the good fortune to plug into a well-sorted AC15, turn it right up and play a power chord, you'll recognise Channel 1. At higher volumes you get a full bodied, purring overdrive, thickened by harmonic overtones. There's no spikiness, and when you pick out the notes of a chord the Regal 15 responds with jangle ➧➧

FACTFILE
GARTONE REGAL 15

DESCRIPTION **15W/7.5W twin-channel all-valve combo with 12" speaker. Made in the UK**
PRICE **£1650 (£1495 with Tayden Ceramic)**

CONTROLS **Volume & Tone (Channel 1), Volume, Treble, Middle, Bass (Channel 2), Half/Full power switch, Reverb (both channels)**
SPECS **Two EL84 power valves, 5Y3 rectifier, three ECC83s, one ECC81, Mercury Magnetics transformers, turret board construction, birch ply cabinet, extension speaker jack**
DIMENSIONS **508mm high, 610mm wide, 228mm deep**
WEIGHT **20kg/44lbs**

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An 18W cathode-biased EL84 combo which offers the choice of the sound of the original rocky, bluesy London or the tone of an AC15 – or you can combine the two channels, with a six-way switch adjusting the mid focus. Comes with a 12" Celestion
RRP **£1599**

Fargen
AC Duo Tone
This Fargen design promises two channels to cover 'all of your EL84 Brit-tone needs'. The V15 channel is based on a AC30, the M18 channel is all about Marshall. Mercury Magnetics transformers, cathode biasing and a WGS Green Beret speaker
RRP **£2199**

Despite the very Bletchley-flavoured looks the Regal can deliver a whole lot more

and chime. It's not all about overdrive and, although never truly 'clean' in the technical sense, overdrive only really kicks in at around 4 on the Volume.

The key to the success of Channel 1 is the Tone control. Unlike certain old Vox amps, this channel never sounds dull because above the midway point the Tone knob actually adds presence, only rolling off highs below this point. The midrange will always sound thick and woody and the bass will always sound big, but at least you have dominion over the amount of cut and bite. At higher Tone settings the Regal 15 even manages a hint of Fender-like twang and quack, but the speaker and power section keep things resolutely British.

Channel 2 replaces the purr of Channel 1 with a full-throated roar. The EQ controls may seem straightforward but they exert such a strong influence over such a wide range that some experimentation is required to explore the full range of tones. The trick is to move the controls slowly and listen carefully to the changes.

There's a little more gain, but it's remarkable how well the volume levels of both channels balance out. At equivalent settings, Channel 2 can be dishing up the dirt while Channel 1 is handling milder overdrive. There's no onboard channel switching, but an external switcher should work fine and the low level inputs add versatility.

Quality glass, including two EL84s and full valve rectification

The Regal 15 is different to many small valve amps and it goes beyond boutique politeness into ruder tonal territory

Channel 2 doesn't have Channel 1's pure, straight-through quality, but it has a far wider range of tones. Garton has chosen the centre frequencies for the EQ controls with care, and they proved effective with all our test guitars. Mids can be scooped and treble and bass boosted for huge clean and semi-dirty Hendrix tones that have an almost Fender-like glassiness. You can boost the mids and adjust the treble for the preferred degree of edge, and Channel 2 provides all the aggression you could need for heavy blues and classic rock.

Sustain is impressive and both channels respond well to playing dynamics and guitar volume roll-off. Depending on the pickups, we found they operated best with the channel volumes set between 5 and 8. When pushed harder we noticed a hint of papery fizz, especially on Channel 2, and low notes started getting a bit looser – just like many vintage low-power amps.

The reverb is a real bonus. It can get fairly cavernous but the dry sound still cuts through clearly even at maximum settings. It doesn't provide a surfy, dripping-off-the walls effect but rather a well-voiced ambience that adds a 3D quality to clean tones and remains unobtrusive with overdrive.

We also ran the Regal 15 through a Celestion G12 Greenback and a Jensen P12Q. The Tayden sounded clearer, brighter and louder, making it the best match for this amp by some distance.

Verdict

By the time we had to send the Regal 15 back, we still hadn't made up our minds which channel we preferred. Perhaps the TMB side favours humbucking guitars; perhaps single coils sang best through the Voxy channel... but too much depended on what we were actually playing to state this as an absolute. While many smaller valve amps produce refined overdrive at usable volume levels, they generally fall short of that 'big amp' excitement. The Regal 15 is different because it goes beyond boutique politeness into ruder and more brutish tonal territory. It can do the sweet stuff too, but you may find that full volume on both channels results in more distortion than you actually need. This is a positive, however, because it means that the volume controls stay effective across their whole ranges rather than hitting a point, about two thirds of the way up, beyond which nothing much changes. Most decent amps have a sweet spot – but with the Regal 15 we just kept on finding them. With this amp, you'll be spoiled for choice.

FINAL SCORE

GARTONE REGAL 15	
Build Quality	**19**/20
Versatility	**19**/20
Sound	**18**/20
Value for money	**18**/20
Vibe	**18**/20
TOTAL	**92%**

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ROLAND
Cube 40GX

With tons of sounds and the ability to link hands with your smart device for home recording, the latest Cube is trying very hard to please. Review by **Martyn Casserly**

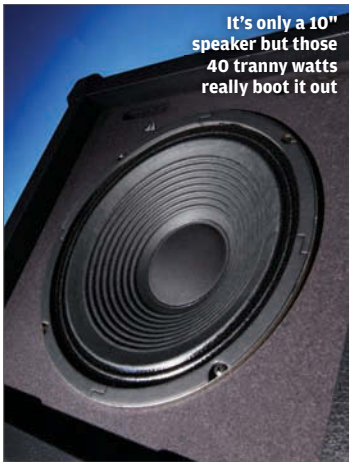
For years the Cube series of amps have graced the bedrooms and practice studios of many a musician. They have never picked up any awards for cultured design or elegant aesthetics, but they have built a reputation for great tones and hard-wearing construction that's far more useful than looking pretty. Now the series has seen a nip-and-tuck revamp which adds a few features that can make that other small black device, your iPhone, part of the band.

The Roland Cube 40GX sits at the upper end of the range, with only the gig-ready 80W 80GX above. This makes it a loud little amp, almost too loud. If you live in a secluded house at the bottom of rarely-explored forest trail, then feel free to whack it up and let freedom ring. If, like most of us, you dwell in a more densely populated area then the Master is going to be hovering pretty much a hair above zero for most of the time. That's not a big issue, as the Cube range doesn't bother with valves which require proper volume to get singing; the solid state innards can be played with plenty of venom at bedroom levels and then let loose when you get to rehearsals.

Sporting the now famous industrial black livery with silver perforated grille, the 40GX looks every inch a Cube amp. Roland didn't think it was enough, though, and decided to replace its logo a while back with the all-caps CUBE legend, so that even when it's turned off you feel like it's shouting at you. Call us bluff old traditionalists (and considering that most guitars, pedals, and amps are based on designs over half a century old, so you're on safe ground) but we miss the 'R' in the top left-hand corner. The newer one just feels a bit brash. Of course you could level that accusation at most of the external elements. The corner pieces are chunky black plastic, the silver-topped dials lack a certain class, and the general absence of sleekness could cause Jony Ive to spontaneously combust in a furnace of artistic panic. So does this mean that the Cube 40GX is a bad amp? Absolutely not. It's a great one.

Plugging in a guitar reminds you why the Cube range is so popular. The 40GX features three channels, JC Clean, Lead, and Solo, plus three FX sections, which gives the user a wide range of sonic options. The Lead channel also has ↦

The £79 GA-FC footcontroller expands live controllability


It's only a 10" speaker but those 40 tranny watts really boot it out

The Cube 40GX has three channels, one with 10 COSM amp models, plus three FX sections for a wide range of options

FACTFILE
ROLAND CUBE 40GX

DESCRIPTION
40W 1x10" modelling combo. Made in China
PRICE **£235**

CONTROLS **JC Clean, Lead, and Solo (Memory) channel selectors; tuner, tap tempo; Treble, Middle, Bass; EFX knob (Chorus, Flanger, Phaser, Tremolo, Heavy Octave); Delay knob (Warm, Clear); Reverb knob (Spring, Plate); Master Volume, JC Clean Volume, Lead Volume and Gain**
AMP MODES **Acoustic Sim, Black Panel, DLX Combo, Brit Combo, Tweed, Classic Stack, Metal Stack, R-Fire Stack, Extreme, Dyna Amp**
CONNECTIONS **Input jack, four-pole mini-phone i-Cube Link/Aux In jack, 1/4" Recording Out/Phones jack, footswitch jack, power in**
DIMENSIONS
41cm high x 41cm wide x 22cm deep
WEIGHT **8.9kg /19.6lbs**

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Peavey
Vypyr 30
Another solid modelling combo, featuring 12 amps with both clean and dirty channels, plus loads and loads of effects
RRP **£199**

Orange
CR60 Combo
New solid-state 60W combo from Orange that might be a bit light on digital options, but has some great tones on offer.
RRP **£349**

The controls may be plasticky but the layout is simple and the sounds are good

10 different COSM amp models going from slightly dirty up to heavy wig-out territory. If you add one of Roland's GA-FC foot controllers (£79) then you can harness these features into a working pedalboard with the ability to swap channels and engage effects. The Solo channel can also be used to store a user-defined tone, turning it into secret weapon that can be employed easily during a gig. Roland are pushing the 40GX as a giggable amp and, while a frenetic drummer might cause you to disagree, as long as you can get a mic on it this would be a good, inexpensive unit for small venues.

For many people, though, this will be a domestic amp, and there are a few features built-in that suggest this might be its ideal location. Alongside the normal three-band EQ, FX controls, and various volume/gain controls, there's also a 3.5mm jack input marked i-Cube Link. Using this you can connect your iPhone, iPad, or iPod Touch directly to the amp and actually record your playing onto the free Cube Jam app once you've downloaded it from the App Store. Initially there are a few demo tracks to play along with, but you can also import any song from your iTunes library. The reason to do this is that the app can remove the main guitar line (or at least quieten it) and allow you to record a version yourself. You can also slow down the track without changing pitch, or transpose it if you don't fancy detuning for all those Hendrix and Slash tracks. It's not perfect, and the inability to loop the demo tracks or have a four-beat click-in is mystifying, but it does add fun to practising. The headphone socket also acts as a recording output as long as you have an interface that can take a signal from a ¼" jack.

Two footswitch sockets allow channel and FX selection plus access to your solo sound

Sounds

With Roland and Boss being part of the same company you always know that the tones coming out of their COSM powered devices will be quality. The 40GX delivers with great cleans that sound especially full and sparkly when mixed with a touch of onboard reverb. Steve Cropper-style riffs just beg to be played, while jazzy comping returns very satisfying results.

Moving through the gears on the dirty amp modes is also a pleasing experience, although you do need to balance the Gain and Volume controls differently on several of the models to avoid muddy tones at low volumes. Early Clapton grit is there, as is AC/DC leads, and even '80s hair-metaltastic distortion that demands you turn up the delay and get those fingers a-tapping. At higher volumes the reverb can have a slight digital cloud as it fades, but judicious use will avoid it becoming a problem, and otherwise it sounds deep and rich, particularly when used with the tremolo effect.

Verdict

A few years ago the 40GX would have been a very easy amp to recommend without reservation, but recent changes in the home amp market pose some awkward questions. If you want something that can be used as a live rig for small, mic'ed up gigs as well as practice and bedroom playing then yes, the 40GX is a competitively-priced amp that can do those things well, especially when paired with the GA-FC controller. For players who just want something to use at home it's a more difficult choice. With desktop options such as the Yamaha TXR10 and Roland's own Cube Lite offering extremely compact designs, integration with your PC or Smartphone, and optimised for home volumes, the classic boxy design is starting to look and feel a little cumbersome. The 40GX is a great amp that's lots of fun to play, and which can produce some excellent tones. Whether you should buy one or not depends very much on where you intend to use it.

FINAL SCORE

ROLAND CUBE 40GX	
Build Quality	**17**/20
Versatility	**17**/20
Sound	**17**/20
Value for money	**18**/20
Vibe	**16**/20
TOTAL	**85%**

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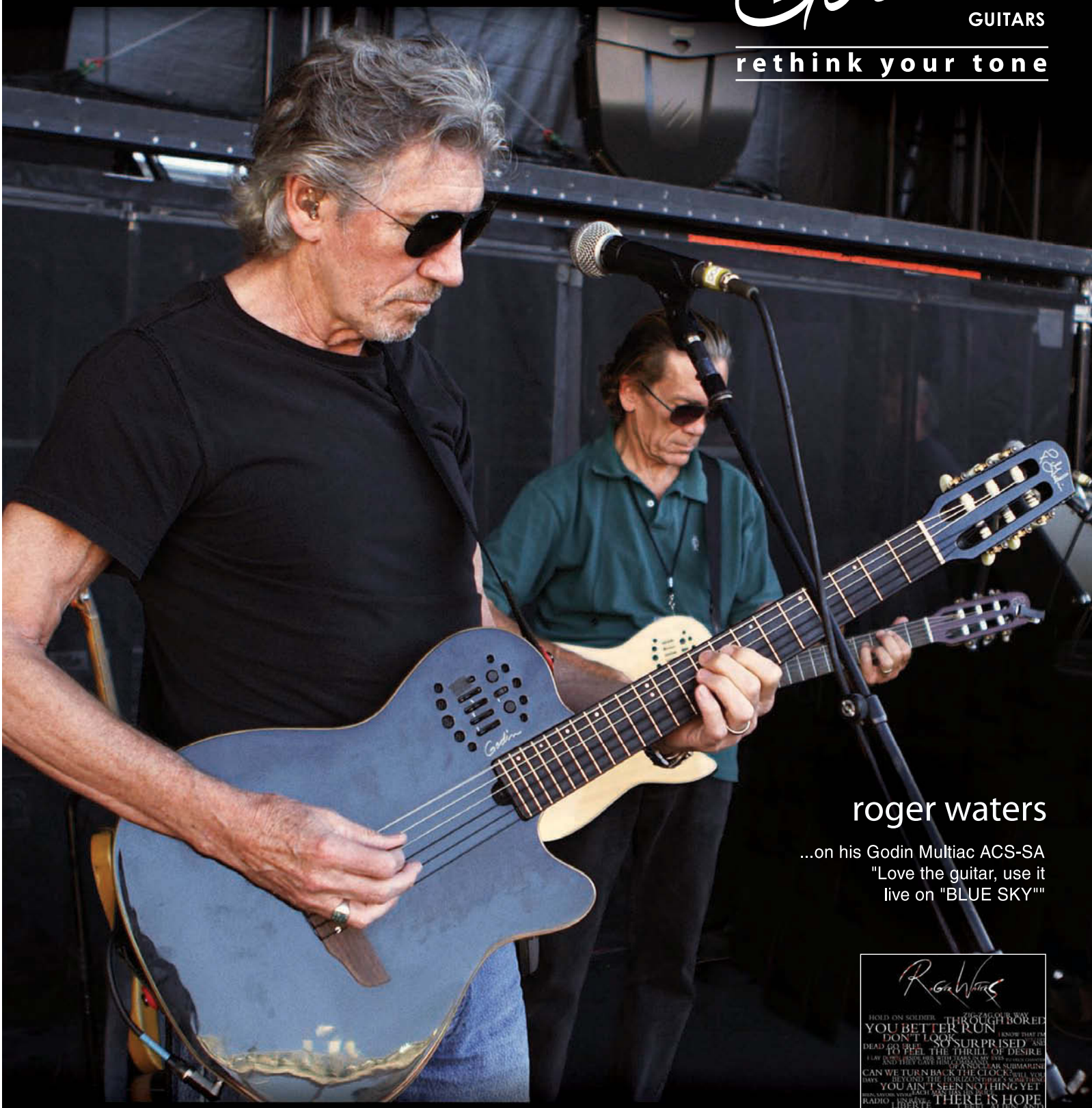

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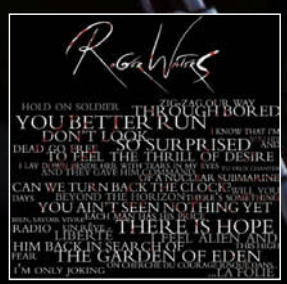

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RRP **£162**

TC Electronic
Ditto
The one-knob wonder that's small enough to carry to gigs stuffed into your nostril: effortless
RRP **£105**

ELECTRO-HARMONIX

45000 Multi-Track Looping Recorder

If you crave dense sonic stews then this updated version of the EHX 2880 has many advantages – and some drawbacks. Review by **Richard Purvis**

A new bit of Electro-Harmonix kit is guaranteed to lighten the winter gloom as sure as setting fire to your shed, and this great American institution has really been pumping them out in recent years. While classics like the Big Muff Pi and Deluxe Memory Man are still holding their analogue end up, there's now a daunting array of digital EHX gadgets to dabble with too. Here's one of the latest: a device that looks more like a mixing desk than a stompbox, and can't decide whether it's a looper or a multi-track recorder.

Well, it's both: it's a looper that allows you to record onto four separate tracks, mess about with relative levels and panning, then mix down onto one stereo track... and then add another four tracks on top of that if you want to. It has stereo inputs and outputs, as well as the option to transfer files to and from your PC or Mac via USB, and the name is a reference to the seconds of uncompressed 16-bit audio it can store on the supplied 4GB SD card (the previous 2880 model came with a 1GB card). That works out as 750 minutes, in a maximum of 100 loops, and slots

The 45000 looks scary and the manual has 21 pages, but it doesn't take long to battle through the bemusement and enjoy yourself

1 to 34 on the card complete with pre-recorded drum patterns.

In Use

The sheer number of knobs, sliders and buttons might make the 45000 look scary – and Muff-loving stoner rock casualties beware, this thing comes with a 21-page manual – but it doesn't take long to battle through the bemusement and start enjoying yourself. That's especially true if you've also managed to beg an extra £85-ish to purchase the optional foot controller, which we would advise, as it allows you to record, play back and hop from one stored loop to another without bending over and knocking over someone's drink with your headstock. The floor controller is highly, highly recommended.

A 4GB card comes as standard; you can upgrade as far as 32GB

And so is engaging the Quantize button, at least to begin with. This gives you a four-click count-in and tidies up the end of your loop to the nearest bar; no more fretting about hitting the switch at the millisecond-perfect moment. Getting the first track down is easy, and then it's just a question of selecting the next one to pour some more of your magic over the top… and then the next two after that. Pan to taste, mix at your leisure.

The white buttons on the right offer extra functions such as punching in and out, syncing with an external MIDI clock and, for the sonically reckless, the joys of reverse mode and an octave drop. Then there's the tempo slider which, tape-style, changes pitch as well as speed. Its glissando action cleverly locks onto fixed semitones, allowing you to glide up and down without struggling to get back in tune with yourself. It is cool.

What other features might you expect to find on a high-priced looper? Familiar functions like undo and delete, perhaps? They're not here – and that's the 45000's most surprising weakness. To make a loop disappear, you have to save a new one over it; to make a single take disappear, you have to record over it with the fader set low, which will cause the original recording to gradually fade away. On the plus side, creative use of this feature can blur the line between looper and long delay, meaning you might even be able to pull off some creepingly organic post-rock key changes.

Verdict

We've tested this out as a guitar device and had a spiffing time all round, but perhaps we should also have handed it to a mob of sideways-baseball-capped street urchins and let them get 'urban' on its ass. It is a powerful and fun-stuffed tool for guitarists, but inventive musicians with gritty old drum machines and analogue synths might find more lasting value in its stereo capabilities. Either way, loopers have come a long way and it's nice to see that the pioneers of Electro-Harmonix have not been left behind.

FINAL SCORE

45000 MULTI-TRACK LOOPING RECORDER	
Build Quality	**17**/20
Playability	**16**/20
Sound	**19**/20
Value for money	**15**/20
Looks	**18**/20
TOTAL	**85%**

FACTFILE

45000 MULTI-TRACK LOOPING RECORDER

SPECS **Four-track digital looper pedal. 9v power supply included. Made in the USA**
PRICE **£350; add £85 for the optional foot controller**

CONTROLS **Level knobs for left and right inputs, headphone output and metronome; faders and pan controls for dry output and four recording tracks, faders for mixdown track level and tempo/pitch**
BACK PANEL **Left and right inputs and outputs (1/4" jack), aux input (stereo mini-jack), stereo headphone and mono monitor outputs, foot controller input (1/4" jack), MIDI in and out**
SIDE PANEL **USB in/out, slot for SDHC memory card (4GB card included with unit, but takes up to 32GB)**

CONTACT **Electro-Harmonix www.ehx.com**

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REELIN' IN THE YEARS
SUPERFLY
THAT LADY
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MONEY
TOO ROLLING STONED
DIXIE CHICKEN
MAGIC MAN
CARRY ON MY WAYWARD SON
WALK THIS WAY
FREEWAY JAM
BEAST OF BURDEN
BAD PENNY
FLY LIKE AN EAGLE
SULTANS OF SWING
WONDERFUL TONIGHT
LE FREAK
MY SHARONA
LIMELIGHT
COMFORTABLY NUMB
RUN TO THE HILLS
MANEATER
ELEPHANT TALK
LENNY
PRIDE (IN THE NAME OF LOVE)
OWNER OF A LONELY HEART
CUTS LIKE A KNIFE
ONE THING LEADS TO ANOTHER
BIG LOG
YOU GIVE LOVE A BAD NAME
BLACK STAR
PRIDE AND JOY
SHAKESPEARE'S SISTER
FINISH WHAT YA STARTED
SLOW TURNING
SEE A LITTLE LIGHT
SMOKING GUN
TUFF ENUFF
SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT
CLIFFS OF DOVER
ENDLESS, NAMELESS
DAMN RIGHT I'VE GOT THE BLUES
WICKED GAME
COMEDOWN
BLUE ON BLACK
SWALLOWED
SCAR TISSUE
ALIVE
NO RAIN
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VOX
Tone Garage V8 Distortion

With extremely striking looks and a real, properly-powered valve grinning through the window, the V8 makes a bold impression on the eyes and the ears. Review by **Huw Price**

The V8 Distortion is part of Vox's Tone Garage series of stompboxes, which were developed by designers and engineers in the UK, Japan and the USA. It features an onboard valve with an LED backlight under a clear plastic canopy. This can be removed to provide access to the valve should it ever need replacing.

Not all valve pedals are what they pretend to be. Some run the valves at very low voltage, and some have even been shown to pass signal with the valve removed. Those that do run at full HT voltage are often quite bulky and require special power supplies. The V8 features Vox's Hi-Volt technology, providing the valve with 200V while getting its juice from six AA batteries or a regular 9v supply. For prolonged valve life there's also a slow-start heater circuit. The case is only slightly taller and wider than a regular pedal, and there's an on/standby switch next to the DC socket.

Controls comprise Vol, Bass, Tone and Gain. There's also a Mid Shift switch that changes the band where the midrange peaks. The Gain control has been configured so that it changes tonal character as well as amplitude.

Sounds

There's nothing incongruous about the term 'mild overdrive', but many of us may regard distortion as an all-or-nothing thing. The obvious temptation might be to turn Gain right up from the start, but then you'd miss out on the V8's exceptional range of tones and distortion textures.

If you minimise Gain and crank up Vol, the V8 gives you a fairly clean boost with fantastic touch-dynamics and a straight-through tonal quality that we'd associate only with the very finest pedals. The Tone may need to be turned right down and switching on the Mid Shift fills out the midrange, but the V8 will certainly bring a valve amp to life at low and high volume levels.

As gain is increased, the distortion characteristic has something of an edgy Class AB character rather than a smooth Class A sound. With the Mid Shift off it's not unlike a hot running Fender blackface amp, with emphasised treble and bass. Switching Mid Shift on brings up the midrange and yields a more British rock tone. The dynamics remain fairly uncompressed and you can easily tell the differences between pickup settings.

At high Gain settings the V8 provides brutal crunch with effortless sustain. The Bass control helps in keeping things tight, and the way this pedal retains definition is very impressive. Disengaging Mid Shift really works for rhythm playing, and solo tones will have a Hendrix/Frusciante vibe.

Engaging Mid Shift brings the upper mids forward, thickening the tone for more aggressive chord work and soloing. With some bridge pickups we occasionally felt like there was an octave overtone creeping in, which added yet another dimension. Higher gain settings don't really clean up when guitar volume is turned down; instead you get the same sound, at lower volume, with no loss of dynamics.

Verdict

The only practical drawback to the Vox V8 is that you have to remember to switch it off to preserve the batteries and valve because the input jack is non-switching. The V8 is a highly versatile and dynamically responsive pedal with all the fizz-free valvey goodness you could hope for.

FINAL SCORE

VOX V8 DISTORTION	
Build Quality	**16**/20
Versatility	**18**/20
Sound	**19**/20
Value for money	**18**/20
Vibe	**19**/20
TOTAL	**90%**

FACTFILE
VOX TONE GARAGE DISTORTION

DESCRIPTION **Valve distortion pedal. Made in Japan**
PRICE **£155.99**

CONTROLS **Volume, Bass, Tone, Gain, Mid Shift toggle**

CONTACT **Korg UK**
01908 304601
www.voxamps.com

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HTD Tube Distortion
Valve distortion with Volume, master Tone and Drive controls, true bypass, solid metal housing. 18v power supply included
RRP **£126**

Behringer
VT999 Vintage Tube Monster Pedal
Featuring a 12AX7 valve, switchable noise gate, hardwired bypass, controls for Gain, Treble, Mid, Bass and Master. Price includes power supply
RRP **£49**

LAG
Plus

LÂG
Tramontane T77DCE

With warm-hued mahogany, stylish design touches, a cutaway and onboard electronics, this guitar makes a strong pitch for the contents of your wallet. Review by **Huw Price**

Kudos must be given to Lâg because few people are turning out nicer-looking guitars at this kind of price. The finish is excellent, the binding work can't be faulted and there's an overall crispness and precision to the design and build that wouldn't be out of place on instruments costing twice as much.

Having said that, the materials used in the construction are fairly humble. The mahogany certainly looks superb, but this guitar has a laminated top as well as laminated back and sides. The grain of the front and back looks similar, but while the back appears bookmatched, it's hard to see whether there's a centre join in the top. The mahogany sides have closer grain and display some subtle figuring, but the factor that really lifts this guitar is the 'French Satin' finish. As well as enhancing the natural beauty of the wood, the soft sheen feels gorgeous and there's no grain sinkage whatsoever. It's a classy finish that requires no excuses and neatly avoids the 'dipped in plastic' look that many guitars in this price range tend to display.

The same black plastic binding is used front and back, with thin layers of off-white pinstriping adding definition to the body outline. The factory has also rolled over all the edges, which greatly adds to the comfort factor. This work has been done with precision and we particularly like the way the roll-over graduates back to a square edge a centimetre or so before reaching the neck joint. It's very classy.

Useful cutaway and neat black body binding

Preamp comes with 3-band EQ, phase reverse and a tuner

The laminated materials may be humble but the finish is excellent and there's a crispness to the design and build

The Occitan Cross is the emblem of the Languedoc region where Lâg guitars originated; the company has developed a modern rosette design that incorporates this ancient symbol and it gives their acoustic guitars a very distinctive look. The one on this guitar is black with off-white pinstriping to match the binding, although the pictures of this model that we found online show a mahogany cross, and we think the contrast looks even better.

Lâg uses a stacked heel with a single join that's hard to spot and a squared-off heel shape that falls somewhere in between a vintage Gretsch and a Froggy Bottom. It's a mahogany neck with a relatively slim, modern and comfortable profile. The headstock is scarf-jointed with a mahogany overlay that's about 5mm thick all along the central section. The edges of the peghead are routed to reduce the depth for the tuners.

Rosewood is used for the bridge and the fingerboard. There are no markings or inlays on the front of ➔

FACTFILE
LÂG TRAMONTANE T77DCE

DESCRIPTION **Cutaway dreadnought electro-acoustic. Made in China**
PRICE **£329**

BUILD **Laminated mahogany top with laminated mahogany back and sides, mahogany neck, 20 fret rosewood fingerboard, black satin diecast machineheads**
ELECTRICS **Shadow-made NanoFlex pickup and DirectLâg Plus preamp**
LEFT-HANDERS **No**
FINISH **French satin body and neck**

SCALE LENGTH
25.625"/650mm
NECK WIDTH
Nut 43mm
12th fret 54mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 19mm
Ninth fret 21mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 36mm
Bridge 53mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 4mm
12th fret bass 5mm
WEIGHT **2.2kg/4.8lbs**

CONTACT **Barnes & Mullins**
01691 652449
http://uk.lagguitars.com

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Fender
CD-140SCE
Cutaway dreadnought with solid mahogany top, laminated mahogany back and sides, scalloped X bracing, mahogany neck, rosewood fretboard, Fishman Presys system with active onboard preamp and tuner, natural gloss finish
RRP **£273**

Guild
D-125CE
Solid mahogany top, back and sides, scalloped spruce bracing, mahogany neck with satin finish, rosewood fretboard, mother of pearl rosette and dot inlays, Nu-Bone saddle, rosewood bridge, chrome hardware, Fishman Sonitone pickup system. Price includes case
RRP **£479**

Dean
Exhibition Aphex Mahogany
Cutaway mahogany body and neck, ebony board, pearl diamond inlays, 22 frets, black hardware, Grover tuners, DMT-12EX preamp with tuner and Aphex Aural Exciter, and a natural gloss finish
RRP **£341**

The Occitan cross in the soundhole rosette makes a distinctive trademark

The Lâg T77DCE still manages to sound like a mahogany dreadnought: midrangy, upfront, punchy and solid

the fingerboard, but there are small white dots on the side. The fretwork is adequate rather than impressive; a decision has been made to leave some of the higher frets only partially crowned and the bass side fret edges along the fingerboard tongue are not quite as rounded off as they could be.

The Occitan Cross reappears on the rear of the unbranded diecast tuners.

Black fittings all over, from the tuners to the saddle and the bridgepins

They're satin black chrome, which ties in visually very nicely with the logo, the binding and the black graphite nut and compensated saddle.

The onboard pickup system pairs a NanoFlex undersaddle piezo pickup with a DirectLâg Plus preamp and control panel. The system is made for Lâg by Shadow and the equalisation controls include Bass, Mid and Treble. Push-button switches are provided for phase reverse and the integrated tuner, along with a Volume slider and a low battery indication LED. The system runs on two disc-shaped mini batteries that are stacked in a tray that slides out of the control panel.

Sound

Despite its laminated construction the T77DCE still manages to sound like an all-mahogany dreadnought. The high frequencies have a sweetened quality that remains clear and uncluttered by harmonic overtones. Rather than the big bass and trebles with scooped mids that characterises so many dreadnoughts, the T77DCE really focuses on the midrange. It's upfront, punchy and solid, with a pleasing degree of woodiness. For a guitar with a laminated top, the dynamic response really impresses. The T77DCE isn't a loud dreadnought by any means, but it's certainly loud enough and it really responds to playing touch. If you're a slide player looking to set up a high action then the T77DCE sounds very smooth and downhome. In fact it's suprisingly good, given that a high action should be at odds with the fast neck and cutaway body.

As an undersaddle piezo, the sound of the pickup system is fairly typical of its type. It's not a hi-tech onboard microphone or a specially-voiced magnetic pickup sort of tone; instead it's bright and clear, with plenty of handling noise transmitting through the body and a dynamic response that isn't quite on the money. Even so, we were able to get palatable tones from the T77DCE by rolling back the treble and bass. The midrange control was powerful enough to draw out a wide variety of tones without creating a 'processed' effect, and the phase button helped to control feedback. The onboard tuner also works reasonably well, but the labelling and display lights are so tiny that those without good eyesight will need to wear their spectacles on stage.

Verdict

As with plenty of sub-£500 instruments, making sure you get this Lâg set-up as well as possible will benefit your experience no end – and we think the T77DCE certainly justifies any extra bit of effort or expense. If you are primarily interested in amplifying your acoustic, then the laminated top shouldn't be a deal-breaker; however, solid mahogany-topped dreadnoughts with equivalent specs are available around this price or even slightly below, so if unplugged tone is priority number one, you may decide to investigate some other options. Overall, however, Lâg has served up a stylish, well-made and fine-sounding acoustic guitar at an affordable price.

FINAL SCORE

LÂG TRAMONTANE T77DCE	
Build Quality	**18** /20
Playability	**17** /20
Sound	**15** /20
Value for money	**15** /20
Looks	**18** /20
TOTAL	**83%**

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ARIA
501 & 515

The new Aria 500 acoustic series is all about a return to simple core values – solid timbers, traditional looks, and a sound that delivers. Review by **Rick Batey**

Only just announced, the new 500 Series from Aria has a very basic premise: all-solid woods, namely solid sitka tops with non-scalloped, quarter-sawn X-bracing and solid Indonesian rosewood or Indonesian mahogany backs and sides, and two body styles, a dreadnought and an orchestra. There are no cutaways available, nor any electronics; this new series is all about trying to offer the best possible acoustic tone in a traditional package at a tempting price – and a price, we might add, that includes a basic hardshell case. We've got two examples in for review, the rosewood 515 dreadnought and the 501 mahogany folk guitar.

Streaky solid mahogany back and sides and a mahogany neck

Rosewood bridge with compensated bone saddle and plastic pins

These new dreads and orchestras have sitka tops, solid rosewood or mahogany bodies and non-scalloped bracing

501

The 501 falls roughly into the Orchestra Model category, measuring 15.75" across the lower bouts and 11.75" across the upper bout, with a maximum rim depth of four inches. These are pretty much the measurements for the classic Martin design, but this Aria is a tiny bit chubbier and more rounded in outline.

There are plenty of very Martin-esque touches, though. You can't miss the herringbone front purfling, so reminiscent of Style 28 Martins up to 1947, and there's a herringbone strip in the multi-ply soundhole rosette, too, plus cream-coloured plastic body binding, nice and shallow in the vintage-approved manner. Seeing that the 501 has a mahogany back and sides (the 505 is the rosewood version), in old-fashioned terms it really shouldn't have herringbone as mahogany would normally go with the plainer Style 18 trim and the binding should be black, but Aria is free from having to stick with these exacting specs, and on the 500 series the more upscale decoration is carried over both timber options.

The bridge itself is shaped pretty much as the Nazareth folk would have done it, although it's a little wider than normal... about the size of a well-done but slightly oversized replacement bridge. Pins are cream plastic with black dots, and a little uneven in height; the compensated nut is real bone, though, as is the nut. The position markers are little square snowflakes, and there's even a reinforcing 'dart' carved into the neck behind the nut in familiar Martin fashion. From the front, the main point of originality is the headstock, which is Aria's rather sweetly-designed outward-flaring shape with curved sides.

The 501's sitka top – gloss-finished, like the whole body – has a medium-fine grain. It's not a perfect top, ➔

FACTFILE
ARIA 515

DESCRIPTION **Folk-sized acoustic. Made in Indonesia**
PRICE **£499 inc. case**

BUILD **Solid sitka spruce top, solid Indonesian mahogany back and sides, 20-fret Indonesian mahogany neck, rosewood fingerboard with snowflake markers and rosewood bridge, rosewood headstock overlay, compensated bone saddle, bone nut, open-gear machineheads**
ELECTRICS **None**
LEFT-HANDERS **No**
FINISH **Gloss w/satin neck**

SCALE LENGTH
650mm/25.625"
NECK WIDTH
Nut 44mm
12th fret 55.5mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 21mm
Ninth fret 25mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 36mm
Bridge 55mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 1.8mm
12th fret bass 2.0mm
WEIGHT **1.9kg/4.2lbs**

CONTACT **Aria UK**
01483 238720
www.ariauk.com

Like this? Try this...

Hudson
VE Series HF70
Solid sitka and solid rosewood/maple OM with upmarket trimmings including herringbone and plenty of abalone
RRP **£749**

Recording King
RO-310
Solid adirondack and solid mahogany folkster – fairly plain, but even more affordable than the Aria
RRP **£369**

FACTFILE
ARIA 515

DESCRIPTION **Dreadnought acoustic. Made in Indonesia**
PRICE **£539**

BUILD **Solid sitka spruce top, solid Indonesian rosewood back and sides, 20-fret Indonesian mahogany neck, rosewood fingerboard with snowflake markers and rosewood bridge, rosewood headstock overlay, compensated bone saddle, bone nut, kidney-button sealed tuners**
ELECTRICS **None**
LEFT-HANDERS **No**
FINISH **Gloss w/satin neck**

SCALE LENGTH
650mm/25.625"
NECK WIDTH
Nut 44mm
12th fret 55.5mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 21mm
Ninth fret 25mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 36mm
Bridge 55mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 1.9mm
12th fret bass 2.0mm
WEIGHT **1.95kg/4.3lbs**

CONTACT **Aria UK**
01483 238720
www.ariauk.com

Like this? Try this...

Sigma
DR-28V
Available discounted at around £399, this spruce/rosewood herringbone dreadnought looks the part but lacks the Aria's solid back and sides
RRP **£464**

Faith
FSHG Saturn Hi Gloss
Impressive Eggle-designed dreadnought in solid spruce and solid rosewood with an ebony fingerboard and bridge. A more modern looker with a fine sound
RRP **£699**

Herringbone binding and soundhole decoration, and D'Addario strings as standard

The Aria 501 is eager, bright and balanced and really big and open-sounding for a new folk-sized guitar

with a touch of run-out showing as a slight colour difference between the two halves and with four faint knots scattered about the lower bout, but that's fine... we like a bit of character.

The mahogany used for the back and sides is excellent too, straight-grained and streaky, and the two sides are perfectly bookmatched where they meet at the butt. The inside of the body is as neat as the outside, with clean mahogany kerfing and no signs of glue squeeze-out. An 'Aria' stamp on the inner back strip and a subtle parchment-coloured label are nice additions. Truss-rod adjustment, incidentally, is via a nut protruding through a top brace, so any tweaks will be nice and easy.

The 501 orchestra has open-gear tuners

The 501 has a mahogany neck, one-piece but with a stacked heel, and it's finished in a speedy satin finish. The fingerboard is rosewood with 20 narrow frets. Up at the rosewood-faced headstock lies a set of open-gear tuners with tension adjustment screws in the buttons, and they work well.

All the 500 Series guitars have a full 25.5"/650mm scale length and the 501 also has a nut width of 44mm or just a shade under 1.75", which is excellent news on a classic fingerpicking guitar of this style. Add in a neck that's 55mm wide at the 12th fret and a string spacing of 55mm from low E to high E at the bridge, and you'll find plenty of room for your fingers.

This guitar has been set up with coated 12-53 D'Addario EXP16 strings, with a medium-low action and just a touch of buzz on the D and A strings around the third to the eighth frets that could do with sorting out. Most of all, though, it's reasonably lightweight, and the slim and gently rounded satin neck makes for a very easy player.

FINAL SCORE

ARIA 501	
Build Quality	**17**/20
Playability	**17**/20
Sound	**18**/20
Value for money	**18**/20
Looks	**18**/20
TOTAL	**88%**

Sound

The 501 is really big and open-sounding for a brand-new instrument, and especially so for a folk-sized guitar. It's not a bad idea to always look for sheer volume when choosing a new guitar as many instruments will sweeten over time but few, if any, will get appreciably louder as they age, but this one impresses both with what it puts out and the level at which it does it. It's eager, bright and balanced, strums very nicely and thumbpicks very well indeed, with plenty of instant response and a likeable woody character. You can get many cheaper folk-size guitars, but on the whole we think the price of this one is definitely reflected in the sound.

515

If you take the 501, inflate it to dreadnought proportions and substitute Indonesian rosewood for the mahogany back and sides, then you've got the 515. Again we've got a shallow-depth but reasonably wide and roomy satin-finished mahogany neck with a rosewood fingerboard carrying snowflake markers and tiny cream plastic side-dots. The set-up is equally playable, including an admirably low-cut bone nut, but again there's that exact same noticeable buzzing on the D and A from the third fret upwards, so a little fettling would be in order. This time, incidentally, the machineheads are not open-gear types but sealed chrome kidney-button units, and they work smoothly.

Again the body is glossy all over, and just as on the 501 the top finish is thin enough to let a little grain texture show when held up to the light... no thick coat of goopy polyester on these Arias. It's a good quality finish with the exception of a little messiness at the corners of the fingerboard by the soundhole, and on this model the herringbone trim and cream binding really look the part.

The sitka top is of decent quality with the odd little ripple in the grain, and as on all the 500 Series models it comes unadorned by any pickguard; we like it well enough without, but popping a guard into the case pocket for a future owner to install if needed might have been a thoughtful touch.

The rosewood used for the back and sides is a very high grade considering the 515's price – a very, very dark shade of brown-to-black and even and

All the 500 series Arias have pearl snowflake fingerboard markers

admirably straight-grained. With denser timber and more of it, the 515 naturally weighs more than the 501, but not by much. It's a fairly light guitar.

Sound

Played side by side with the mahogany 501, the 515 makes a fine demonstration of what happens when you go up from a mahogany OM to a dreadnought body and add rosewood. It's thicker and more stentorian in the bass and midrange, slightly louder again thanks to increased internal volume and a larger soundboard, and adds that typically rosewoody complexity and upper-end harmonics to the mahogany's plainer, more fundamental sound. This makes for a lusher-toned rhythm guitar that sounds very grand with a light pick. The bottom end is bigger but not overwhelming, and there's a lively pop to the middle that rewards flatpick work. Though it gains fullness and richness on the wound strings, on the 515 this extra weight hasn't quite translated to the plain strings as they're a little thin and chimey and don't have the bold fatness of the B and top E on the smaller 501. Making sure that the saddle has perfectly smooth corners might help, and changing the EXP16s to a set of heavier gauge strings with a 13 top could also improve matters; we'd certainly try it, and with its slick neck the 515 would still be a mighty speedy player even with more generous wires.

Sealed chrome tuners on the 515

Impressive rosewood for the £500 price

Verdict

Anyone who thinks that Aria will never regain the heady heights of their Japanese-built period of the '70s and '80s with guitars like the Pro II electrics, the SB basses and the signature model PB and JJ acoustics could go some way towards cheering themselves up by inspecting the 5 Series instruments. We think that in the current climate the introduction of this new acoustic family does mark something of a welcome return to form. For around the £500 mark you have every right to expect a genuine and noticeable step-up in terms of tonal quality from guitars costing £300 or so; the Arias manage it, and they've done it the old-fashioned way, not by ladling on more decoration or lower-grade pickup systems that you may or may not need, but by providing proper solid woods and well-voiced bracing, and that's not at all an easy thing to find at this kind of price. They're nicely specced, tastefully appointed, lightweight, playable, and sound very likeable.

FINAL SCORE

ARIA 515	
Build Quality	**17**/20
Playability	**17**/20
Sound	**17**/20
Value for money	**18**/20
Looks	**18**/20
TOTAL	**87%**

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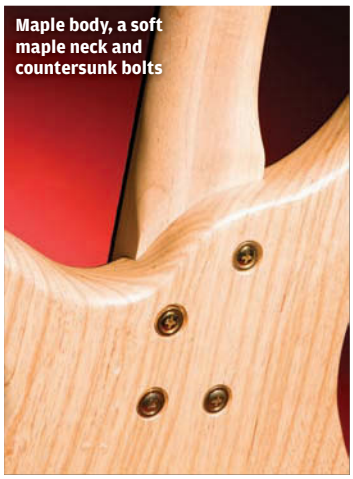
BASS COLLECTION
Speakeasy Pro 4

If you rue the proliferation of well-worn '60s designs then you'll welcome the reappearance of the sleek-looking Bass Collection series, and especially this flagship model. Review by **Gareth Morgan**

Some of you may remember the original Bass Collection instruments from the late '80s and early '90s. The SB460 series was built in Japan by Nanyo Boeki and distributed in the UK by the Bass Centre from its citadel in Wapping, London. They were sleek – sleeker than a Jazz Bass – and this down-sizing attracted those with shoulder and neck issues who wanted less weight on their support shoulder, and also the smaller in stature, or newcomers to the instrument for whom the accepted Fender-size body was a serious obstacle to playing comfort.

The sleek, up-to-the-minute Bass Collection looks also brought plenty of pro players to the BC party, most notably Nick Fyffe with Jamiroquai and Chris Wolstenholme, who wielded a pair of SB300 Series basses with Muse during the *Showbiz* era, both live and in the studio. Production ceased in the early/mid '90s and the brand lay dormant until it was acquired by House Music – which represented something akin to completion of the circle, House Music being the force behind the now internet-only Bass Centre colossus.

We reviewed the Speakeasy model in our April 2006 issue (Vol 17 No 2), a budget-priced active belter good enough to make it into the top three *G&B* basses in Gear Of The Year. A steady trickle of new instruments has continued to flow, most notably the traditionally-appointed Power and Jive models, but this month it's the turn of the swanky new Speakeasy Pro.



Maple body, a soft maple neck and countersunk bolts

Back-angled gold tuners on a narrow headstock

There's no mistaking the fact that the Korean-made SP is a rung or two up the ladder, with a sumptuous, tiger-striped walnut top with real richness and depth. When we talk about 'tops' this often indicates wood a couple of millimetres thick, but here you get 8mm of walnut glued to a 30mm chunk of soft maple. Add those together and, naturally, you end up with 38mm, which is 4mm shallower than a Jazz Bass, and the body is around 40mm narrower too. The waist has a comfort-inducing ribcage chamfer, while the top horn is sleek and angular and the lower one is a stubbier 'thumbs up' shape with a cutaway deep enough for easy access to the highest frets.

The neck is a three-piece maple affair with an ultra-slim, almost squashed C profile. It's as super-fast in feel as Bass Collection necks always have been (well, it would have been a bit silly to have designed a down-sized bass and then fitted a tree trunk for a neck). Neck and body are held together by a four-bolt retention system, while the heel-less joint increases high-register playing ↦

FACTFILE
Bass Collection Speakeasy Pro 4

DESCRIPTION **Solidbody bass. Made in Korea**
PRICE **£695**

BUILD **Walnut top on soft maple body with bolt-on three-piece maple neck with 24 medium jumbo nickel frets on an ebony fingerboard. Bass Collection Gotoh-style tuners and Bass Collection Hi-mass Hi-sustain bridge. Gold hardware**

ELECTRICS **Active with one Bass Collection Power Humbucker and one Bass Collection Jive Single Coil. Bass, Treble, Balance and Volume controls**
LEFT-HANDERS **Yes, from late 2014**
FINISH **Natural satin**
RANGE OPTIONS **Five-string Speakeasy Pro 5, £895**

SCALE LENGTH
864mm/34"
NECK WIDTH
Nut 40.5mm
12th fret 54mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 20mm
12th fret 21mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 11mm
Bridge 19mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 2.5mm
12th fret bass 3mm
WEIGHT
3.33kg/7.36lbs

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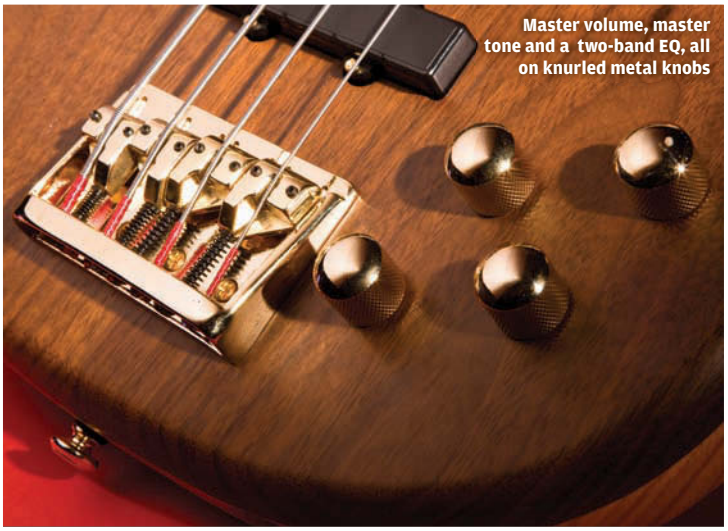
Master volume, master tone and a two-band EQ, all on knurled metal knobs

The Speakeasy Pro is a bass that should appeal to those for whom Fender-type dimensions are a major obstacle

comfort still further. Both the headstock and the neck at the body are faced walnut; a classy detail.

The headstock is also tiny relative to the big, sprawling monoliths you'll often find atop many a neck; it's almost a lollipop-shape. Plenty of headstock angle creates an excellent break angle for the strings as they pass over the shiny old-school brass nut and onto a classy-looking ebony fingerboard, which carries 24 expertly-seated medium jumbo nickel frets.

Bass Collection has chosen to do away with all front-facing fingerboard markers, but you'll find a row of small white dots along the top edge. Hardware-wise it's a sea of gleaming gold, with four Gotoh-style small-button closed gear tuners in two up/two down formation on the headstock and a chunky BC Hi-Mass Hi-Sustain bridge.

The Bass Collection brand was born in the active era and of course the Speakeasy follows suit with one split BC Power Humbucker in the neck position and a slim BC Jive Single Coil at the bridge funnelled through a pair of active bass and treble EQ controls, with pickup balance and volume controls completing the picture.

One of the arguments often levelled against smaller-body basses is poor balance but the SP is no more or less stable than many revered and classic basses, and it's a paragon of virtuous stability when slung over your shoulder.

The Speakeasy Pro's walnut slab top is a thing of grainy beauty

Sounds

Plugging in uncorks a clean, clear sound with a fiercely up-to-the-minute character. There's a pleasing growl at the bottom end and the midrange errs towards the higher end of the spectrum – big on bright and snappy, but lacking a bit in the punch and impact department. The clarity is excellent, but the highs are very affected by the high mid-bias so the SP is a little over-nasal in its basic sound, although, to be fair, there are elements of the fizzy, crystalline sound you'd expect to get from a Stingray.

The Speakeasy delivers a more traditional sound on the neck pickup, with that nasal element reduced dramatically, superseded by a harder-hitting midrange and earthier lows which are certainly bassier but still lack a bit of bottom end. Clarity is still excellent but it feels more under control, and the heavy zing from thinner strings is overpowered by cleaner, chiming highs that are less brittle and more practical. Switching to the bridge pickup, there's plenty of burp in the tone, plus a lack of bottom end and a surfeit of fizzy zing, but it's not as metallic as the twin-pickup sound.

Engaging the EQ is a fruitful course of action as dialling in extra bass immediately gives the Speakeasy a more weightily authoritative sound, throwing a thick cloak over the lively top end; the zing's still there, but it's no longer the dominant feature. In fact this setting with its smooth midrange and ample fundamentals is as close as you'll get to a scooped mids sound from any bass. Dialling in more treble reclaims much of the edge, recreating the original twin-pickup flat EQ tone but with far more body and drive behind it. On the neck pickup, injecting bass EQ changes the decently earthy tone into a really good and slighter fatter version of the P-Bass type sound, adding authority and growl to the lower strings. It's solid and punchy in the midrange and thinner strings have plenty of substance for melodic excursions. There's a more even, open feel to the highs and if you dial in some treble they open up just a little bit more. In twin mode, hiking treble increases the zingy element and it's a similar story with the neck, although to a lesser degree. These may work in a solo bass context, but not really for the bulk of bass work.

Verdict

Bass Collection's Speakeasy Pro is a well put-together and handsome-looking bass that should appeal to those players for whom Fender-type dimensions are a major obstacle. Tonally, the twin pickup sound is a disappointment – too zingy and with not enough bottom end – but that's compensated for by the clean earthiness and stylistic versatility attained via the soloed humbucker. Perhaps the main issue is the price, as £695 is near the top end for a midrange active, although it's fair to say that its modern good looks and fine playability make it an instrument that many will be happy to pay a little extra for.

FINAL SCORE

BASS COLLECTION SPEAKEASY PRO 4	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Playability	**19**/20
Sound	**14**/20
Value for money	**15**/20
Vibe	**17**/20
TOTAL	**83%**

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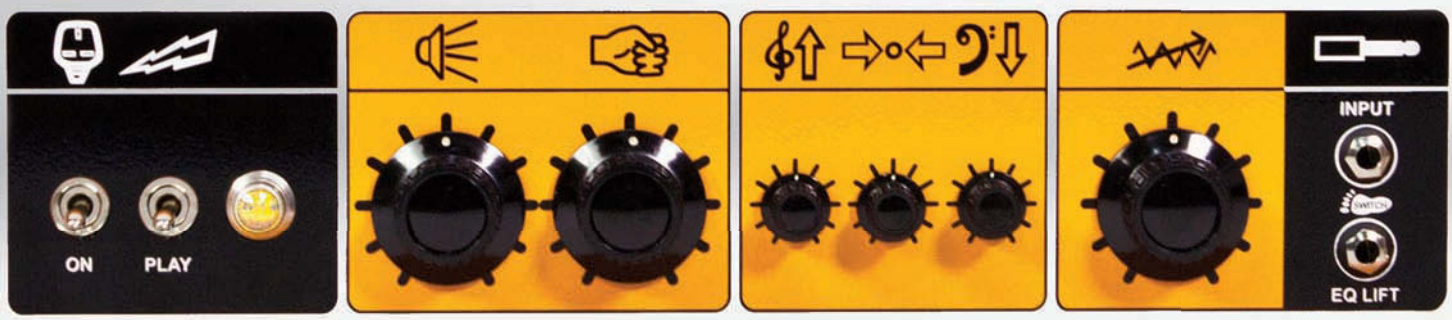

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V-4B 100W bass amp & SVT-112AV 300W cab

If you desire the Ampeg SVT sound with only half the payload, then the all-valve V-4B claims to cram the sound of 1971 into a modern, more adaptable, more portable package. Review by **Gareth Morgan**

Here at the *G&B* Mission Control, the advent of a new piece of high-spec Ampeg gear is always cause for celebration. Ampeg, of course, is one of the longest-standing manufacturers and purveyors of bass amps (and, to a lesser degree, basses). Established in 1946 by Everett Hull with Stanley Michaels as Michaels-Hull Electronic Labs – the named was changed to Ampeg in 1949 when Hull became sole proprietor – they produced their first bass amp, the Portaflex, in 1960.

The big stuff appeared in 1969 with the brutish 300W all-valve SVT (Super Vacuum Technology) which weighed in at a colossal 85lbs and actually carried the health warning 'this amp is capable of delivering sound pressure levels that may cause permanent hearing damage'. You can get a Heritage reissue of this behemoth, the Heritage SVT-CL, which we reviewed in September 2010 (Vol 21 No 11). Now Ampeg has added another all-tube unit, the V-4B, a reissue of the 1971 original, plus a pair of cabinets, the SVT-212AV and SVT-112AV.

Though Ampeg is very much part of the current trend towards smaller, lighter bass gear, the Chinese-made V-4B, the newest member of Ampeg's Classic Series, comes in a 15mm birch ply box and weighs in at 18.6kg or 41lbs; that isn't really too much, and anyway, it looks great with its silver control panel and cloth grille with chunky badge. At 267mm high, 606mm wide and 283mm deep, taking into account the chunky metal corner protectors and rubber feet, it's certainly on the large side but this also means you get a much vaster expanse of mottled black Tolex overcoat to drool over.

A threatening row of four 6L6 valves pump out 100W of power

The V-4B spits out 100W of all-tube power via two 12AX7 valves and four 6L6GC in the power amp section, with all the internal gubbins sitting in a suspended metal chassis. There's a separate driver stage with one 12AX7 and one 12AU7 which is concerned with voicing and gain. Liberating this stage from the preamp enables the V-4B to run more cleanly at the front end and allows it to be nudged into distortion at low levels without working the preamp too hard, thus reducing the risk of excessive overheating. ➔

FACTFILE

AMPEG V-4B & SVT-112AV

DESCRIPTION **V4-B: single channel 100W valve amp with a suspension system steel chassis in a 15mm birch ply enclosure. 112AV: 300W 1x12" plus horn cab with one Eminence Custom 12" speaker and a HF horn (with three-position level switch) in a 15mm poplar ply cabinet with front porting, speaker out and through jack sockets. Both made in China**

PRICE **£1290 & £535**

CONTROLS **Gain, Bass, Midrange, Treble and Master controls, Ultra Lo, three-position frequency selector and Ultra Hi switches. Two Inputs, Preamp Out Power Amp In, Slave jack sockets and two 2 ohm, two 4 ohm and one 8 ohm speaker out jack sockets, one XLR Balanced Out with Ground/Lift switch**

RANGE OPTIONS **600W SVT-212AV 2x12" plus HF horn cabinet, £755**

CONTACT **Polar Audio 01444 258258 www.ampeg.com**

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Ashdown
CTM-100
Another contender in the 'old-school sound with modern features' race, this all-valve bass head has a similar EQ set up and two KT-88 valves in the power amp, plus classic styling
RRP **£1299**

Orange
BT500H Terror Bass
The super-compact 5kg valve/digital Terror Bass lacks wide-ranging EQ controls but it sounds warm and rocky and it's exceedingly loud, with a clever design that manages to give 500W into both a 4 ohm and an 8 ohm load
RRP **£519**

The control panel has an uncomplicated look and is dominated by a line of five controls with knurled plastic sleeves and silver caps replete with black position marker. Gain adjusts the strength of your inputted signal while Master controls the overall volume. In between you get a three-band EQ of Bass (12dB of cut or 13dB boost @40Hz) and Treble(17dB cut or 14dB boost @4Hz), while the Midrange control works in conjunction with the middle of three cream switches located above the panel. You use this to select one of three frequency points – 220Hz, 800Hz or 3kHz – then the semi-parametric Mid control juices that up by 11dB or down by 21dB. The other two switches are Ultra Lo, which scoops the mids with a 2dB boost at 40Hz and an 11dB cut at 500Hz, and Ultra Hi, which offers a 7dB hike at 8kHz. The input jacks are labelled 0dB and -15dB for active/passive basses and, in true trad style, a pair of chrome switches are provided for power on and standby.

The rear panel bears Preamp Out, Power Amp In, Slave Out and five Speaker Out jack sockets (two each for twin-cab 2- and 4 ohm operation, and one for single cab 8 ohm usage). You can also connect direct to PA or recording desk via a Balanced Out XLR with accompanying Ground/Lift switch.

We've running the V-4B through the smaller of the two cabs, the SVT-112AV. Constructed from 15mm poplar ply, it's slightly heavier than the amp – 20kg/44lbs – but equally classy in its black Tolex attire with silver cloth grille. Taking into account the rubber feet and steel corner protectors, it's getting close to the limit of acceptable size for a 1x12", being 432mm high, 610mm wide and 406mm deep, and for carrying purposes you only get one, side-mounted recessed handle. On the top are eight recessed plastic cups into which you plant the V-4B's feet, thereby guaranteeing that the amp will not move around, even when the dial

A controllable and defeatable HF horn joins the single 12" Eminence driver

Two tone preset rocker switches and a switchable semi-parametric mids section add flexibility

If you lust after an all-valve Ampeg rig but can't afford the Heritage SVT, then you're going to buy one of these

reaches 'ear-splitting'. The 12" driver is a custom Eminence unit joined by an HF horn. The presence of the horn perhaps doesn't sit comfortably with the traditional intent of the rig as a whole but it does allow a better rendition of high frequencies, and there's a three-position level switch on the back so you can turn it off, run it normally or at -6dB. Connectivity is of the traditional jack socket variety, two in number; plug the amp into one, and daisy chain a second cabinet with the other.

Sounds

Plugging in with a flat EQ reproduces the sound of the bass without tonal bias but with a hint of valve warmness. It's plenty fat enough at the bottom end, if not earth-shaking; the gunning growl of the E string is quite simply joy in a note, and thinner strings have plenty of weight and fatness. The midrange is solid and even with plenty of punchy impact for forward motion and definition. Highs are clean and snappy, producing cut and bite without brittleness. You can easily get faster, more aggressive spikey highs via the horn, with the expected trade-off of added finger- and fret-noise.

Bringing in the EQ is a lot of fun and starts to put us in mind of Ampeg's early health warning, especially when we set the Bass dial to full and the room's fixtures and fittings started to rattle uncontrollably; you can really feel it in your gut when you hit a low note. As we mentioned, Ultra Lo is a scooped mids pre-shape, and this gives a smooth, warm tone with a lack of punch and definition which will work nicely for soul and blues. The Treble dial is fairly practical, although full boost is a bit nasty – synthetic, almost – and not as open as we'd like, even with the horn on; about half boost is a far as you want to go. Adding bass boost uncorks a fat, punchy sound with bags of snarl and stature, excellent for rockier gigs where you need to be heard as well as felt. If you want this as a default setting, leaving the Ultra Hi switch on pretty much gets you there.

Of the three midrange settings, boosting 220Hz produces a darker, punchy sound with a tightened bass end, while the other settings are a fraction brighter, with more snarl at 800Hz and a lighter, airier tone at 3kHz. These last two get you closest to a contemporary sound.

Verdict

If you can cope with a fairly weighty amp and lust after an all-valve Ampeg rig but can't afford the wonderful Heritage SVT, you're going to buy one of these, no question. Ampeg has done a great job in putting the V-4B and SVT cabs together; they're cool-looking and ruggedly constructed, and while the V-4B's EQ is a bit limited, it's powerful, and easy to use. A price of £1800 for a Chinese-made reproduction does throws up a few issues, but it looks and sounds like a classic Ampeg – and for many, many bassists out there, that will be more than good enough.

FINAL SCORE

AMPEG V-4B & SVT-112AV	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Versatility	**16**/20
Sound	**16**/20
Value for money	**16**/20
Vibe	**19**/20
TOTAL	**85%**

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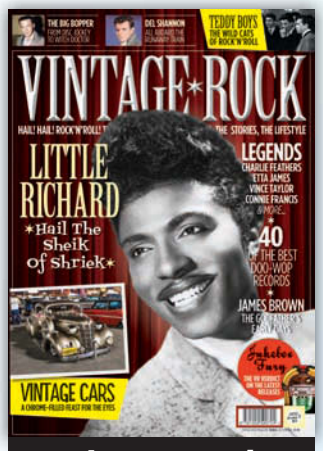

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Sonic EXPLORER

Marillion founder member Steve Rothery has gathered a well-honed selection of instruments to cover the many sounds of the band's lengthy career and also to inspire his many collaborations and solo projects. Interview by Lars Mullen

Formed in 1979, Marillion is one of the longest-standing bands to have evolved from Britain's neo-progressive rock scene, with close to 16 million albums sold worldwide to date. 'I got a call from a band who took their name from a book by JRR Tolkien called *The Silmarillion*. So I travelled down to London in my little Renault 5 rammed with amps, guitars and a 4x12" cab, got the job, and have never looked back,' smiles Steve Rothery, songwriter and guitarist. 'It's been a long time, and we've done a heck of a lot of touring and recording... but, you know, I still love every minute of it. We have a big back catalogue, and when we play live we cover most of the albums from 1983's *Script For A Jester's Tear* right up to the last album from 2012, *Sounds That Can't Be Made*.

'We tour a lot – and the amount we tour depends on the success of the current album. Some trips have taken us around the world two or three times in a year and a half. When that happens, you can get pretty dysfunctional as a human being... you get home and wonder why there's no room service, or why the bed hasn't been made!'

Guitar & Bass met the reassuringly functional-looking guitarist at the band's studio headquarters to be guided through a maze of effects and guitars. 'I must confess to being a total tech-head when it comes to equipment,' Steve admits. 'I think I've managed to keep up with technology fairly well over the years. I actually tour with two completely separate flightcased rigs – one for the early material, the other for the latter part of the band's career.

'I have a fair number of amps and cabs on hand, but for vintage Marillion the Roland Jazz Chorus 120 combo has to be the main ingredient. It's a classic guitar amp in its own right. I always keep a spare JC120 to hand just in case, but it's been really reliable over the years. It has a very identifiable sound and it's very much part of what I do.

'For the early material I rely on the Boss DS1 distortion pedal – although I actually have the Analog Man modified version, as it's a bit cleaner – and a TC 2290 rackmount digital delay, which I feel is the best-sounding effects unit ever built. It used old one-bit converters so it has an ultra-high sampling rate, and the result is better than CD quality.

'I do have a lot of effects running in the chain but I try to keep the original sound of the guitar as pure as possible. The TC 2290, for example, cleverly mixes the analogue signal with whatever effects are selected.

'I always try to have a subtle approach with effects so they don't dominate the sound of the guitar... not too much overdrive and not too deep with the modulation, or you lose the characteristics of the pickups and the guitar itself. I'm fairly happy with my set-up right now. I have six large pedalboards

at the moment, but there are always new pedalboards and rigs to build or modify.'

When it comes to guitars, Marillion fans will recognise two of Steve's older flagship instruments. 'This black Squier Strat has been on countless albums and many world tours,' Steve reveals. 'It's loaded with a set of EMG SA pickups and fitted with a Kahler vibrato. I bought it secondhand back in 1985 for £150 from Chandlers in London. It was my main guitar for many years, and it was on every album from *Clutching At Straws* in '87 to the *Radiation* album, released in '98. I can go nuts with the Kahler and it returns to pitch 100 per cent every time! There might be a little loss of sustain as a trade-off, but it's really minimal... it's a great unit. I also use a capo a lot on this guitar. I started that many years ago... I think it makes open chords sound so much more interesting, especially if the capo is on the third or fifth fret.

'The other Squier, the black one with the white pickguard, is a mid-'80s JV model that I had sent over from Japan. It's as good as any expensive vintage Fender that I've played. It's all down to the woods they used. These JVs are quite collectable now, and they're pretty close to the originals, from the neck profiles right down to the stamped bridge saddles. This one plays and sounds wonderful.

'I'm not that bothered whether a guitar has a maple or a rosewood fingerboard. Maple works well on the Squiers, but I think it's more of a combination of all the woods used and how they resonate together. High quality tonewoods are becoming rarer now, and they're often only found on very expensive guitars.

'I think if you find a guitar that works for you personally, then you can dial in the effects and the amp around that guitar. I find that I approach different guitars in a variety of ways, depending on how they play and resonate, so yes... I really must be a total tone head!

'I'm often given CDs by people when we're on the road, and I'm often disappointed that the guitar sound is brittle and harsh. My advice is always to get the guitars recorded well. You can be playing the best riffs in the world, but if the guitars suck, nobody's going to want to listen to them. That's something I learnt at a very early age.

Left, a Levinson/ Squier with a Kahler; right, a Blade RH4 with a Fishman TriplePlay

Steve's famous and much-modded Squier Strat, plus a Squier JV 57 reissue

'When I was about 15 I was heavily influenced by progressive rock – Genesis, Pink Floyd, Camel – along with Hendrix and Carlos Santana... I loved his sustain. But I soon discovered that with good amps and the best overdrive pedals I could get that kind of sound from a Strat rather than a guitar with a high output and more natural sustain.'

Steve is a big fan of the Japanese-made Levinson Blade guitars, and he's got a few. 'The sunburst one with the white guard is actually a bit of a hybrid at the moment, as it's got a Blade neck on a Squier body,' he explains. 'I was experimenting with mixing and matching bodies and necks – it's that combination of woods working together thing again. This one has a Kahler vibrato, and it's mostly a back-up guitar in case I break a string on the black Squier.

'Another very longstanding guitar of mine is a Levinson Blade RH4, the one with the black scratchplate, which I started using around 1999. This guitar seems to have a little extra something in every department, especially with the mid-boost and beefy Levinson humbucker, which drives the front end of my amps a little more. I've also recently fitted the new Fishman TriplePlay system – it has some ↔

'I have access to a fair few guitars but these Levinson Blades have been working instruments that really do it for me'

very interesting synth possibilities which I'm still experimenting with. It's ideal for songwriting in my studio as I can assign it to play keyboards or percussion... I'm using it with Apple MainStage 3 in Logic at the moment. This guitar made its recording debut on *Anoraknophobia* in 2001. On that album I took something of a new direction when it came to effects, using things like the Groove Tubes Trio and Dual 75 preamps and a Lexicon MPXG2 FX processor, which contributed a lot to the sounds on that album. I stayed with this set up for a while and added the TC 2290 for the *Marbles* and *Happiness Is The Road* albums.

'Another Blade I have has more traditional single coils and a vintage-style bridge. I use a lot in my own studio and for other band projects – for example, when Pete Trewavas and Steve Hogarth from Marillion and myself venture out as Los Trios Marillos.

'I also have a Blade Delta Classic T2 with a set of calibrated pickups. There's an honesty about this guitar I like; it isn't the easiest to play though but it's got a great sound, and, the mid-boost is handy for solos. This one can be heard on several tracks on the *Somewhere Else* album. I got this one from Jason Castle from Blade; it was actually his personal guitar, he was just showing it to me, and I was so taken aback when I played it that I managed to get him to sell it to me!

'I have access to a fair few guitars, but these Levinson Blades have been working instruments that really do it for me. I'm not a badge snob by any means... that little transfer on the headstock makes no difference to me whatsoever!'

Levinson Blade with single-coils and trad vibrato and a Blade Delta Classic T2

Unique doubleneck Steinberger with one 12-string neck and a six-string with a TransTrem

Super-kitsch Italia Rimini 6/12 twin-neck

Steve also has a bent for the unusual, a fact emphatically confirmed by this next one-off. 'In the early 1990s the Steinberger company asked if they could build me a guitar, so I asked for a six and 12-string twin neck! As far as I know, this is the only twin neck they've made in this format. I started using it on the *Afraid Of Sunlight* album in the mid-'90s, where it played a major part in the songwriting, and I've also used it an awful lot live. It's loaded with EMGs, an active tone control, and a transposing vibrato. It's not the lightest but it's not a back-breaker, and it's really well-balanced in the playing position.

'I also have an Italia Rimini twin neck in the same string format. While the Steinberger has those distinct single coil sounds, I wanted a warmer, more vintage-style Rickenbacker kind of sound for my solo studio album *Ostara*, featuring Hannah Stobart. The Rimini does this really well with its Wilkinson mini-humbuckers, especially on the 12-string neck, which I prefer... and it looks rather cool with the white mother of pearl top!

'I like guitars that offer inspiration for writing. Here's another Italia, a Modena, which is a kind of innovative sitar guitar. The upper part of the body has a mini ➔➔

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BARNES & MULLINS

A G Sharp travel guitar and an Italia electric sitar

Semi-acoustics by Cort (left) and Ibanez

harp configuration that resonates with the primary strings, and that has its own lipstick pickup. The sitar effect is created by a Gotoh Buzz Bridge, which sounds quite authentic. I bought this on eBay from America. The shipping numbers got mixed up and I couldn't get my hands on it even though it was in the UK; it actually went back to the USA and then came back again... it was a very frustrating situation! I haven't recorded with or used it live yet, I'm just still having fun experimenting with it.

'When we're touring I like to take a travel guitar with me. I have several, but I do like the G Sharp, built in Norway. This little black OF-1BK has a mahogany body and neck, a maple fingerboard and a single coil pickup. It has a 520mm scale length and, as the name suggests, it's tuned to G#. It's like using a built-in capo. The inventor very generously gave me this one when we were in Oslo about five years ago. It's really a cool little guitar.'

Steve has a couple of thinline semi-acoustics for variety. 'The Cort M900 is excellent value for money, and suits my needs perfectly. It also has an acoustic pickup in the bridge, which is quite handy.

'I used the Ibanez Artstar AM200 for a few tracks on *Anoraknophobia* when I wanted the sound of a semi-hollowbody guitar. It works really well as a small jazzy guitar and it's got some cool trimmings like the gold hardware and the inlaid ebony fingerboard.

'When I put time aside to concentrate on writing, I might have my mind set on a one amp, one guitar combination and see what I come up with. I write and record a lot at my home studio, but 90 per cent of the recording and all the albums are done in the band's own studio. We spend a lot of time here, often having a couple of hours improvising and jamming before we start rehearsals, all of which is usually recorded in Pro Tools. For that I usually consider the Blade guitars, which are always ready to go, but at the moment my first-choice guitars for live work and recording are these Jack Dent models built in North Carolina, USA. I have six different Jack Dent guitars, and I've used them on the latest Marillion album, *Sounds That Can't Be Made*. Jack is an incredible American luthier; I first met him at a Montreal guitar convention about five years ago. We got on really well and I liked the way he built his guitars. He was originally a furniture maker and has a huge supply of exotic tone woods and some great ideas when it comes to electronics and hardware. I flew out to his workshop and we discussed and designed my signature guitar, based on one of his models called the Sludge Rooster.

'I asked for a mahogany body with a tuned chamber, a one-piece mahogany neck, and a bookmatched 5A grade maple top with a cherryburst finish. It didn't take long for him to realise I was a total tone head, and he fitted a pair of custom coil-tapping humbuckers, a Graphtech Ghost saddle pickup system complete with onboard EQ, and a Graphtech hexaphonic MIDI system with a 13-pin output, all of which can be used separately or blended in any combination. It's a guitar that totally keeps up with technology, and it has a versatility which covers my every need.

'Jack Dent is an incredible luthier. He has a huge supply of exotic woods and great ideas as well'

Rothery with his Jack Dent signature guitar

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A Fender-inspired Jack Dent and a Raven with two P90s

A custom-order Jack Dent with single-coils and a hybrid Celeste

'Jack Dent's guitars have this common denominator when it comes to sustain – the necks are set a long way into the body, which adds to the resonance. It's incredible... played acoustically you can still feel the body vibrating when the audible note eventually dies away. He's studied the science and the mass of the body woods. The SR model is a little quirky, and certainly an eye-catcher! I first used it when we toured with the *Less Is More* album in 2009. If anyone would like to hear it, there's a YouTube demo out there.

'You may have guessed by now that when it comes to guitars I'm primarily a single coil man. I got word that this sunburst figured-top JD was hanging on the wall of a guitar shop called The B String in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, so I had it sent over and haven't looked back. It's just awesome, with great woods. It's superbly balanced on the shoulder, and sounds stunning with the Seymour Duncan pickups. This has been a real workhorse guitar.

'I also had a yearning for beefed-up single coils, something a little more gnarly, so next from Jack Dent came this double-cut Raven finished in cola burst with a pair of P90s. I've travelled a lot with this guitar on solo projects, plus working with American composer Jason Hausman and on Steve Hackett's album.

'Pretty soon after the JD SR guitar arrived, I put an order in for one with three single-coils... I used it in New York at the Apple guitar clinic. I also decided that I needed a guitar that would cope with both electric and acoustic requirements, so I settled on this JD Celeste. It's a semi-acoustic design with a hollow mahogany body, a neck profile like a modern electric, and fitted with a humbucker at the bridge. The acoustic sound comes from a Graphtech Ghost System with a 13-pin hexapower MIDI output. But I had to explain to Jack that none of them sonically quite took the place of my main Blade with the single coil/humbucker and midboost system, so he set to work and produced this Custom Raven with a honey burst finish.

'The pickups and electrics are more or less the same as the Blade, but ironically it doesn't sound like the Blade at all! Still, it's gorgeous – it chimes and sustains forever. This guitar came into its own at the Plovdiv Guitar Festival in Bulgaria in October 2013. I was asked to play there as a solo player, which I thought might be a bit scary, so I put a band together with a Dave Foster, a dear friend and an exceptional guitarist. It went down so well that I've decided to record my solo album, *The Ghosts Of Pripyat*, later in 2014, and that'll be done in between touring with Marillion. Also, all these JD guitars can be heard on *Sounds That Can't Be Made*.'

Cutaway classical guitar by Manuel Rodriguez of Spain

A custom Jack Dent with a H/S/S pickup layout like the Blade

As with many successful songwriters, the acoustic guitar plays a major role for Steve. 'Yes, indeed, I have several lying around. This nylon-strung guitar was built in Spain by Manual Rodriguez, one of the oldest Spanish guitar builders. They use woods that have been stored for decades and it gives a really mellow, mature sound, I used this for a track called *Made Again* on the *Brave* album – I wrote it for my daughter when she was born. I'm self-taught when it comes to classical playing; I'm more ragtime syncopated picking than classical, really, using my thumb to fret the bass notes.

'I've got an affordable but good-quality electro-acoustic made by Cort, a jumbo-bodied CJ-10 with all the trimmings; it's a great guitar for the price and just seems to perform spot-on every time. I also have a very lightweight signature acoustic built for me by Farida, called the A-SR. They asked me what woods I wanted and I had a pretty good idea in my head, with a single-cut auditorium-size body. The top is solid spruce, the back and ↦

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Left, a Cort CJ-10; right, a Farida A-SR Steve Rothery model

Two Takamines, a 12-string with LR Baggs pickup and a MIDI-ready Santa Fe

sides are rosewood and the fingerboard is ebony. There's also an indication of my love of folk music with the inlaid Celtic knot design on the headstock. I wanted a smaller-bodied guitar with a huge output and exceptional tone, and Farida certainly achieved that. For the electrics I requested a system blending an undersaddle pickup and a soundhole microphone with Fishman's Ellipse Aura preamp. I have three of these A-SRs, one of which is away in the USA having the Vo-96 Acoustic Synthesiser system fitted and a Tronical tuning system. I'm looking forward to writing with this one and also with the Blade fitted with the Fishman TriplePlay.

'I have two Takamines, a six-string Santa Fe which I bought in 1991, and a 12-string. They've done a heck of a lot of work so they're a little battered around the edges, but like all my guitars they have a purpose in life – they aren't left getting dusty in a corner! Over the years they've had various pickup mods and hardware changes. I have to spend a little time with the EQ on the desk to get a decent sound when mic'ing up the six-string, but the 12-string is really nice... it records well and it's very inspirational as a writing guitar. I've used it ever since the early days of Marillion, way back in the '80s.'

'All your regular chords are thrown of out of the window with the Portuguese guitar, so I've been having fun creating my own'

Lastly, Steve strikes up a tune with a Portuguese guitar. 'This is an unusual but beautiful highly-strung Portuguese 12-string guitar which comes from the family of instruments known as the citterns, and is used in their traditional music, called Fado. I believe this is the Lisbon model, and it's strung in octaves from D to A. I was given this by Marillion's Portuguese fanclub.

'The engineering in the machineheads is an achievement in itself, and it arrived with a tuition book which was beyond complicated! Everything you know goes out the window, so I've been having a lot of fun creating my own chords. It has a wonderful semi-Eastern flavour to it and it rings like a bell... a million miles away from effects and electronics. It's found its way onto the new album and it sits very well in the tracks.

'I get a lot of inspiration from all my guitars... in reality, that's how my collection has slowly built up. As I said, the name on the headstock doesn't really mean that much to me... it's all about the woods. All these guitars have a very different sound, and I have the option to reach out and grab a different guitar each time that will bring the best out of the song I'm writing at the time.

'Having been in Marillion for 34 years, I'm still writing and recording with the band, and that and the solo projects just take up all of my time, but I love every minute. It's what I wake up in the morning for.'

For information on Steve Rothery's latest solo project visit http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/2090204348/steve-rothery-the-ghosts-of-pripyat

Steve with his 12-string Portuguese guitar

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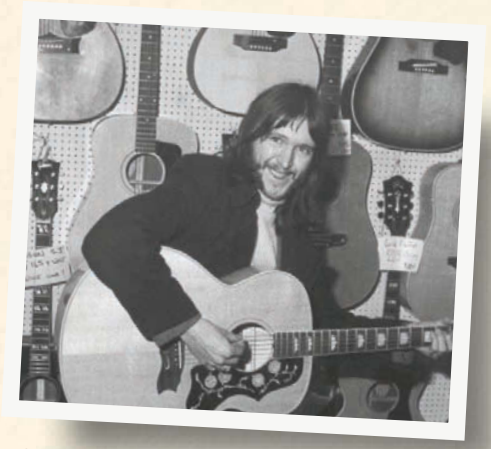

A great guitar needs a great amp, and a great band needs a great bottom end. This month **Sid Bishop** looks beyond the limelight to investigate collecting guitar amplifiers and bass guitars

Why would anyone want to collect amps? Well, they are fascinating artefacts, oozing nostalgia; they can be relatively cheap, and you may actually get to use them. For those reasons I'll focus the first half of this month's feature on that very subject, then move on to bass guitars.

Let's go back to the beginning – the 1930s. The newly-invented electric guitar needed amplifying, and from the earliest days guitar companies made their own range of amps to complement their instruments. These were tiny, generally around five to 10 watts, often looking like a picnic case with a built-in speaker, but considered adequate for the jazz or country bands of the time. The survivors from this period are really museum pieces.

By the early '50s, the ascendance of guitar virtuosos such as T-Bone Walker, Ike Turner, Merle Travis, Les Paul and Scotty Moore had elevated the electric guitar into being a solo instrument rather than just one element of the rhythm section of a big band. Soloists demanded more volume, so amps became more powerful and more sophisticated, adding sonic effects such as tremolo and a spring reverb pinched from Hammond organs. By the end of the decade, there were companies making amps who never ever made a guitar, and the newly-developing amp industry was becoming far more than an afterthought occupying the back four pages of a guitar company's catalogue.

Up until the '60s all guitar amps had been built using valves, or vacuum tubes, and that technology was 'state of the art' at the time. Transistor-based or 'Solid-State' circuitry, evolved immensely during the '60s, and it was then that the first transistor amps became generally available. They were lighter to carry and didn't require a valve change every year or so; the downside was that some early versions were none too reliable, were generally expensive to repair if they did go wrong, and some of them sounded truly awful – but the foundations had been laid.

By the early 1970s, due to the industry-wide decline in demand for vacuum tubes, many valve manufacturers had either gone out of business or changed their technological direction. I recall a conversation with Hartley Peavey at that time in which he estimated that only about two years' global supply remained. Panic ensued, but – primarily owing to the demand from the music industry – production did slowly get back underway. Though for a while it looked as though valve amps were going to become extinct, they survived, and today a comprehensive range of both solid-state and valve amps (and hybrids) is now available to all of us.

One major issue that you must take account of before you begin collecting is the amount of space amps occupy, so ensure you have a garage or secure outbuilding before you think about getting started. You won't get many Acoustic 360s or Marshall 8x10" cabs in the cupboard under the stairs, and any attempt to struggle up to the spare bedroom with them would be just plain silly.

Your collection could focus on one particular brand, but in practice it's more a matter of what you can actually discover at a sensible price. Older Vox, Hiwatt and Marshall valve amps are highly sought after and are likely to cost a great deal of money, so

Early Voxes are highly desirable, '50s Fenders even more so; Selmers have seen a resurgence, while the charming Watkins Dominator is a UK-built vintage favourite

Orange amps have great looks and tons of power; Lazy J is a current UK brand standing on the shoulders of the great Fender designs. Gibsons are underrated, while certain Marshalls are very collectible indeed

Alternative amp brands to look out for include Carlsbro, Sound City, Impact, Jennings, Orange, Matamp, Miles Platting, Vamp and Wallace

for the speculative collector they are probably already out of reach. There are plenty of other makes – Carlsbro, Sound City, Impact, Jennings, Orange, Matamp, Selmer, Kelly, Park, Simms-Watts, Miles Platting, Vamp, SMF – although in truth some are better than others. Classic examples by the likes of Fenton-Weill, Bird, or Dallas will always be tougher to locate, not to mention a handmade Wallace, but grab them when you can. Early transistor amps from Triumph, WEM or Burns might appeal too, together with '70s brands such as H&H or Maine, and even the solid-state units made by Carlsbro or Marshall. Make sure they work; if not, rebuilds could get very expensive. Many components used then have been long discontinued, and schematics can be hard to locate. Valve amps don't usually present quite so much of a problem, but it's nice to buy stuff that works nonetheless. Old junk is exactly that, and if it was made in the '50s or '60s, that only makes it older junk.

When I was a young lad some European-made amps were frequently seen on British stages, and if I were to recall the names Davoli, FAL, Binson, Dynacord or Echolette, this may jiggle the memories of many older readers. Are they really worth buying now? Your money, your decision.

American amps are desirable, as indeed virtually anything else American will be in this marketplace, but remember that none were legally imported into the UK prior to 1959 due to the post-war US trade embargo, and are fairly rare. Those that you do find now will have been brought here in later years by UK bands touring in the US, or by various enthusiasts and collectors. As these were made to operate at 110 volts, you must ensure that any that you do purchase have been retro-fitted with an appropriate, and safe, UK-spec 240v transformer.

The 'Big Five' US guitar companies all made their own dedicated amp ranges; I refer of course to Fender, Gibson, Gretsch, Guild and Rickenbacker, though Fender's amplifiers were historically the most successful. Past decades have seen the rise (and occasional fall) of many other US amp makers, most notably Peavey, Music Man, Baldwin, Standel, Polytone, Sunn, Kustom, Ampeg and Acoustic... and don't forget the excellent Canadian-made Traynors, either. However, as a Sunn 2x15" cabinet is about the same size as a wardrobe and a whole lot heavier, it wouldn't be a bad idea to get the garage cleared out.

There has been an explosion in recent years in small companies making tiny quantities of handmade amplifiers. Quite often these are one-man operations, or at least start out as such, and are founded by a very skilled electronics technician with musical leanings, or possibly a musician with electronic leanings. Either way, this sector is normally referred to as the 'boutique' market. A brief surf through the internet will pull up dozens and dozens of such makers, and the names of Mango, Swart, Red Plate, Weinbrock, Albion, Louis, Tone King, Wayman, Lazy J, Risson and Dumble seemingly represent just the tip of a very big iceberg. Beautifully crafted, and doubtless of a superb quality, most are also cringingly expensive. It seems quite likely that you could buy four new Fender Twin Reverbs for the individual price of some of these amps, so can they be worth buying with any long-term investment in mind?

Well, it appears that some have been changing hands for serious money; a Dumble recently sold for $30,000, which may have been a good result for the owner, but most modern handmade amps are so expensive to start off with that it could take years before their secondhand values outstrip the initial purchase price, if indeed they ever do. A few boutique makers such as Mesa-Boogie, Matchless and Rivera have become prolific enough to move into 'mainstream' territory. They are great amps, and you could buy one for precisely that reason. If, in the fullness of time, they were to become sought-after collectables, that could be a nice bonus.

It's not possible to look into the future and predict what might or might not be valuable in a decade's time, more's the pity, and in reality it's a gamble. Sometimes you win, and sometimes you crash and burn. That's the way life is... but you must ask yourself whether potential future value is necessarily the best reason for buying something. Perhaps most importantly, you'll have had some really great gear to use.

This being *Guitar & Bass* magazine, it's only right that we take an exploratory trip into the world of collecting bass guitars. As the newly electrified six-string 'Spanish' guitar became established as a popular solo instrument, upright double bass players must have been looking at these new-fangled instruments with considerable envy, and wondering why they were being left out. Luckily, it wasn't too long before the same technology was adapted and utilised for the bass.

Prior to the arrival of a bass guitar,there had been a number of electric solidbody upright basses available, and these had been around since the late 1930s. Most had shrunk to not much more than a triangular slab of solid wood fitted with a magnetic pickup, still with a conventional fretless bass neck attached to it, and an extendable metal spike, or pogo-stick, to stand it on. These remained popular with some players, even following the advent of the bass guitar, and especially so in Europe, where companies such as Framus and ↦

Gibson EB-0 basses like this '63 have charm, but the short scale keeps prices down. A '51 Precision is any vintage bass fan's dream, while Rickenbackers retain a strong following

Eko were still producing them well into the '60s. However, by the '40s a couple of designers were already experimenting with fretted upright electric basses, so it obviously wasn't an enormous leap to turn the instrument through 90 degrees, reduce the overall weight and dimensions somewhat, and a bass guitar would magically appear.

The person forever credited with taking this crucial step was Leo Fender. His Precision Bass guitar, the first full production version of such an instrument, appeared in 1951. Original examples had a non-contoured slab body, echoing Fender's existing Telecaster (somewhat confusingly a Telecaster Bass was to follow in 1968, though with a contoured body and a different pickup configuration). The twin pickup narrow-neck Jazz Bass arrived in 1960, and all of these were long scale instruments. Demand for a shorter scale Fender bass, aping the dimensions of Gibson's early models, resulted in the Mustang Bass, much used by Bill Wyman, followed in the '70s by the entry-level Musicmaster Bass, similar in outline to the Mustang but with a cost-cutting particle-board body. Many other models have appeared since: five-strings, six-strings, Coronados, Jaguar Basses and other variations far too numerous to catalogue fully here. As with anything else, older models are rare, highly prized, and expensive. The newer they are, the cheaper they get, so you can draw the line where you like, dependent on your budget. Any genuine Fender bass is a safe bet.

Gibson favoured a more traditional approach, and their first bass guitar, the EB-1, of 1953, was violin-shaped, which they hoped would satisfy the more conservative bass player. It also came with a 'pogo stick' so it could be played upright, was fretted, and had a solid mahogany body with painted-on f-holes. Their EB-0 appeared in 1959, with a body borrowed from the double-cutaway LP Special and Junior guitars. By this time they'd lost their 'pogo sticks', as the bass guitar had been firmly established in its own right. Their semi-acoustic EB-2 appeared in 1958, based on the ES-335 guitar, and a twin pickup EB-2D. A handful of experimental six-string examples of the EB-2 were also built.

Gibson's SG guitar range superseded the single-cutaway Les Pauls in 1961, and inevitably there was a bass version, still designated EB0, with a twin pickup EB-3 added in the same year. Up to the late '60s all Gibson basses other than the Thunderbird had been short scale, but eventually an EB-3L long scale appeared, and a single-pickup EB-4, also long scale. A brief reissue of the original EB-1 violin bass appeared in 1970; these are quite scarce. Other '70s models include the Grabber, G3, and Ripper, which most feel will never fetch big money because of their looks. The same goes for the RD Artist bass, plus

The person forever credited with the first full production electric bass guitar was Leo Fender, and his Precision Bass appeared in 1951

the Victory bass which was made from 1981-'86 and which I personally consider to be truly horrendous. However, old EB-1s are sought after, as are first-series Thunderbirds. The EB-6, a six-string version of the EB-0, is especially rare; I've only ever seen two.

Many companies sought ways of launching a bass guitar in the shortest time possible, the result being that most makers hurriedly cobbled together bass versions of their existing six-string guitars. The '50s and '60s saw basses from Gretsch, Kay, Mosrite, Danelectro, Guild, Hofner, Burns, Futurama and pretty much everyone else.

The Rickenbacker company was a little slow off the mark, and their first bass, the 4000, didn't arrive until 1957. Following on from their Combo guitar, it had a neck-through body construction, a format unmatched until Gibson's Thunderbird bass in 1963. The 4001 (and 4003) was a later version with body purfling, Rick-O-Sound stereo and triangular fingerboard inlays. This model became one of the most popular bass guitars ever; it's still very much in production and regularly spotted in the hands of the world's greatest players, making it a safe and wise purchase. Keep a careful lookout, though, for Ibanez or Tokai-made copies that some clown has put a Rickenbacker truss rod cover on.

Ampeg were also slow off the mark, their first electric bass not becoming available until 1963, and even then it was still a solid upright bass with pogo-stick. The first proper bass guitar was their AEB1 of 1966, and what a beast it was. The large body and scroll headstock made it quite a handful, and it had f-holes cut right through the body. The first two years production had a transducer pickup, and a magnetic pickup version appeared in '68. Ampeg are probably best known now for the Dan Armstrong-designed plexiglass basses and guitars which bore his name, first appearing in 1969 and made for just two years, although reissued later. Interesting, highly usable, and all worth buying.

Finally, and sadly without time to investigate the Burns Bison or even Alembic, we must mention Hofner. If Paul McCartney hadn't by pure chance purchased a violin bass they never would have achieved iconic status, but he did, and they have. These basses, first appearing in '56, fetch serious money these days, principally due to this association. They've been in and out of production many times over the years, but that star association keeps them coming back – and keeps them a firm vintage favourite.

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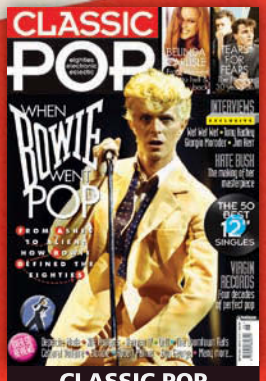

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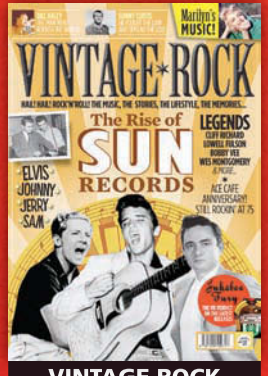

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Solder Your Soul

With hot iron in one hand and a roll of multi-core in the other, we return this month to the land of DIY guitar electronics ready to fix a faulty Fender Strat and to pledge allegiance to the four sacred rules of soldering

In last month's Guitar Workshop we looked at understanding a few of the basic electrical principles that can remove much of the hit-and-miss normally associated with electrical repairs by introducing a diagnostic approach to electrical work and by giving a few examples of it in action. We also outlined the basic tools you will require and went on to introduce multi-core solder and the four sacred rules of soldering. Rule one, 'thou shalt always tin', was explained, and we examined examples of thoroughly tinning both single and multi-core wire. We also explained the fourth rule concerning multi-core solder.

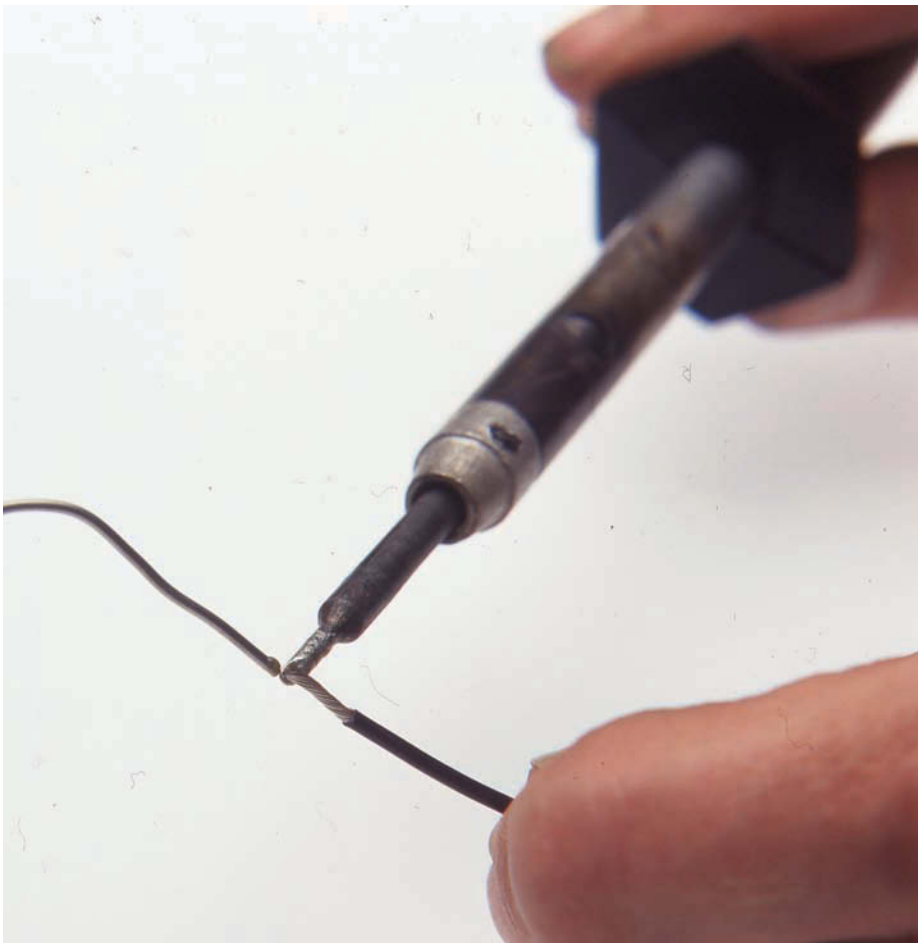
This month we're going to stay with soldering and investigate how to deal with rule two and three. However, for the sake of completeness, let's review the four rules in all their glory.

1. All contacts must be clean of tarnish and oxidation, tidy and correctly tinned.

2. Tinned contacts must be placed together and heated up by the iron sufficiently to melt the solder tinning before any further solder is applied.

3. The new joint must remain completely still whilst the solder both melts and cools.

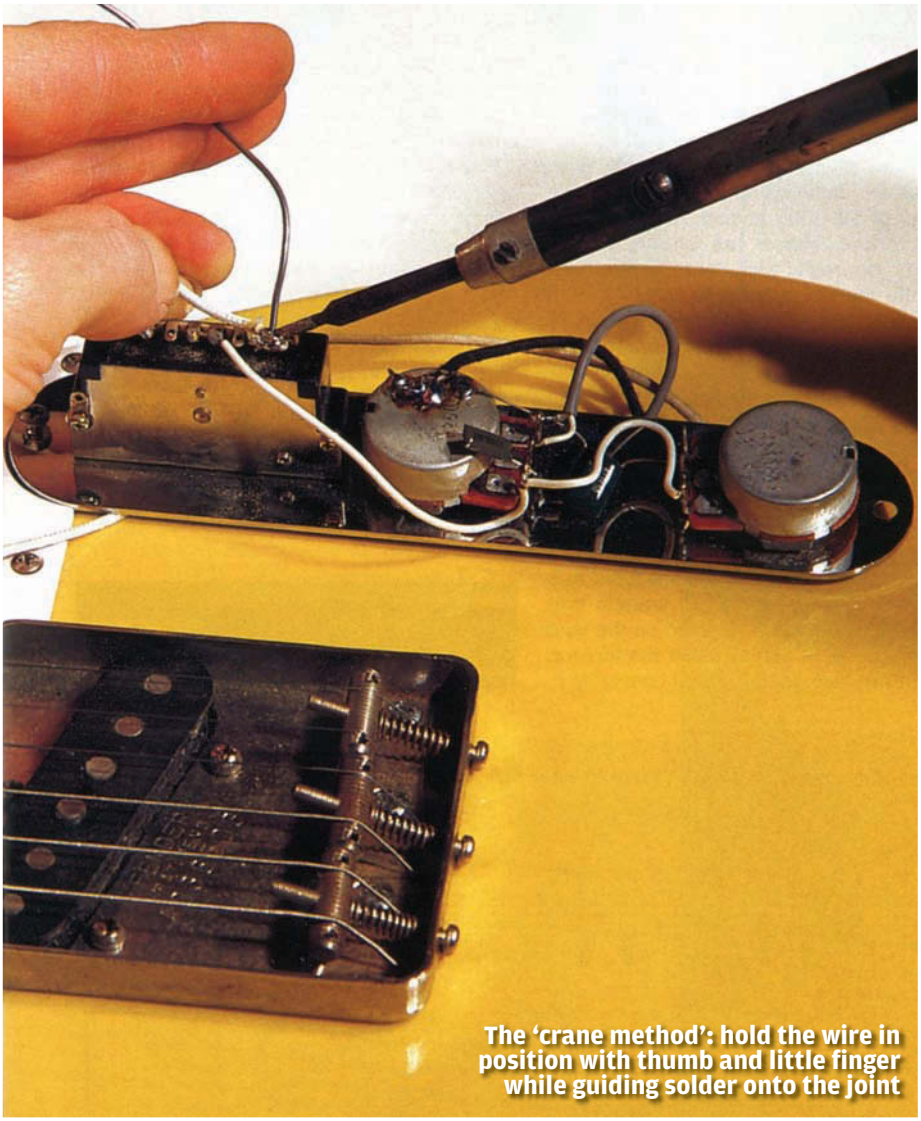
4. Only use multi-core solder.



As you may have guessed, rules two and three happen in quick succession, and once you have them mastered they'll appear like a single action. If they don't run together smoothly then you'll undoubtedly create a high resistance dry joint... not good, and not clever. Making it all happen correctly as one action is difficult because soldering usually requires three hands: one to hold the loose wire in the correct position, another to drive the soldering iron, and a third to guide the solder into just the right position at just the right time. Unfortunately, I don't have three hands. Making do with two is not really a hardship, but it does mean that you will have to learn a few tricks to create a third – and maybe even a fourth – wherever and however they are needed.

A great deal of imagination can go into devising extra hands out of objects that are readily available, an approach I take myself as no two joints are ever quite the same. It's possible to buy soldering aids from electronic companies like Maplins; these cunning devices use flexi-mount crocodile clips to hold wires and components where you want them while you apply the soldering iron. These can help you set up the job so that the eventual soldering can be unhurried and therefore efficiently brief.

One good way that the first extra hand is used is to hold the source of the solder in a fixed position so that a length of solder can be unwound and arranged just as you want it. A large reel of solder helps out here since it's quite weighty and stays where you put it on the table. The stability of the reel, then, is your first extra hand; solder from a light plastic dispenser is harder to manage though it can be held firmly by a laying it on its side beneath a book or heavy ornament.



The 'crane method': hold the wire in position with thumb and little finger while guiding solder onto the joint

Solder joints are individual, so you need to deal with each job as it comes. Practicing on throwaway components helps get a feel for the iron and solder

Once the source has been tied down, sufficient solder can be unwound and arranged to be in close proximity to the work area. Arrange the solder so that it leaves the reel as close to your work top as possible and bend it upwards at 45 degrees as you approach the work. An unsupported length of solder will try to droop or move away from the job at just the wrong moment, so next introduce an S-shaped bend two or three inches from the working end of the solder to make the solder become more rigid and manageable. The S shape is another extra hand – if you arrange the solder like a crane over the new joint it should stay still, ready to be used.

With the solder crane in place, the iron hot and the Anglepoise on, let's consider a fictitious solder job: you have just fitted a new neck pickup to your beloved Telecaster and are about to solder the live output lead to the switch and the earth lead to the rear of the volume pot. The control plate is open and the plate mounted switch lies tags-up, ready to go under the iron. Having tinned the tag and the pickup hot lead, touch the tip of the iron back onto the tag. Watch carefully as the solder melts on the tag as the heat is transferred across from the iron. When all the solder has melted, push the tinned tip of the pickup lead through the hole in the tag and watch as the heat from the tag is transferred across to the wire. Remove the iron only when the solder tinning melts on the wire, and as you do so, blow on the joint to cool it down. The hand used to hold the wire must remain completely still so that the wire does not move as the solder cools.

At this point the wire is soldered to the tag, but the joint is not very strong; more solder is required to make it reliable. Adding extra solder can be quite tricky as the joint will probably spring apart if you apply the iron a second time. This situation calls for dexterity, more cunning and a little rule-bending. I use a technique that involves using my left hand to hold the wire in the correct position with my thumb and little finger while I guide the solder from the aforementioned 'crane' between the remaining three fingers onto the joint. The photo on the left shows this in action. Although this arrangement works most of the time, it's not a universal solution – sometimes you just can't get as close to the job as you wish. On these occasions it is perfectly acceptable to use the iron to transfer solder to the tinned-only joint.

Arrange the solder crane as close to the work as possible and ensure that you can hold the wire in position with your hand. Touch the tip of the iron onto the end of the solder and load it with molten solder. Remove the iron from the solder and touch the solder laden tip onto the tinned-only joint. Watch as the heat transfer suddenly melts the solder on the tag and wire. As it does so the solder on the iron will leave the iron and mix with the solder already on the joint. Remove the iron and once again hold everything completely while it cools, blowing on the joint again to help it along.

As solder joints are so individual you really need to deal with each job as it comes along, be it a string-earth-to-the-back-of-a-pot job or a tiny coil-to-wire connection on a troublesome pickup. Practicing on some throwaway components can help to get a feel of the iron and solder.

If you choose to rewire tricky parts of the guitar electrics away from the instrument, then a small vice is an absolute must. Soldering a tone control capacitor across its tone pot, for example, is much easier in a vice; the same goes for wiring the 'between contacts' cross-wiring for a series/parallel humbucker switch, or a Telecaster pickup selector switch. The job is done quicker and therefore more tidily if the switch is held firmly between the jaws of a vice because the contacts to be soldered are accessible and, thanks to the Anglepoise light, clearly visible and perfectly still.

The next patient is a standard no-frills USA-built Fender Stratocaster. Its problems are twofold: the back pickup is hard to select – switch position 5 works occasionally, mostly it just hums loudly; and the guitar hums when the musician takes his hands off the strings.

HANDS-OFF BUZZ

Any guitar that hums has an earthing problem, and this guitar certainly hums. The 'hands-off buzz' is probably down to a break somewhere in the earth circuit. When repairing any guitar with these symptoms, first check the wire which joins the strings at

A dry solder joint to the earth tag is part of the problem

Resoldering the pickup earth return wire to a pot casing

Fender changed their string earth design in the ’70s, niftily creating a single earth point which also allowed the body cavity to be screened

the bridge to the earth side of the controls – usually to the back of the volume pot casing. This wire is commonly called the ‘string earth’ and most passive guitars become hummy if this wire is broken or is making poor contact.

With this Strat it’s unlikely to be a problem at the bridge end of the wire. Fender changed their string earth design in the ’70s, making a serious attempt to avoid such problems with a body-mounted solder tag and shielding paint on the inside of the body cavity. The new tag was positioned near the control cavity and was wired in two directions: one wire to the vibrato spring-claw, the other to the rear of the volume pot, with the tag also in electrical contact with the shielding paint. A nifty idea, because the earth tag sorts out many of the earthing problems within a Fender type guitar: firstly it tidies up the earth plane within the guitar by creating a single earth point to which all the relevant parts of the circuit can be connected; secondly, it enables the body cavity to be screened.

Adding the tag also protects the wire that runs to the vibrato spring claw from being yanked when the scratchplate is removed – a common problem with the original design. If you inadvertently pulled hard on the old type of string earth lead, it was possible to jar the solder joint on the spring claw enough to make it become one big dry joint, right where you need one the least. Resoldering this connection is very difficult as the large spring claw draws the heat away from the joint; a successful resolder of this joint requires serious cleaning and every bit of power the solder gun can provide. Adding the tag avoids this by moving the weak point to a more manageable position where it can be easily re-soldered. The wire will still get pulled at some time or other – but thanks to the tag, it’s easy to repair.

MAKE THE SWITCH

The second problem with the Strat, the intermittent, humming problem on switch position 5, is familiar: the contacts used for the bridge pickup (position 5 on the switch) are probably twisted out of alignment. If so, they could be touching the metal chassis of the switch when the bridge pickup is selected. If the chassis of the switch is not earthed then it could be making contact with the live or hot output of the switch and so humming when touched. In the worst case it could hum even if not touched.

SURGERY TIME

Removing the scratchplate reveals that the string earth connection at the aforementioned tag has become a dry joint, probably through being tugged one too many times. The selector switch is chronically infested with crud to the extent that the contacts used for position 5 are eaten almost half away (crud never sleeps). The only solution is to bin the whole part and replace it with a new switch. The earth connection to the rear pickup has also become a dry joint, and this is contributing to the hum in position 5. Resoldering the earth tag and the pickup earth return wire will cure the hum, and replacing the switch will bring the rear pickup back to life.

DRY JOINTS

As you can see, dry joints were responsible for most of the problems with this guitar. Spotting them is an important part of troubleshooting electrical guitar problems. Fortunately, this is relatively easy: dodgy joints usually take on a mottled, dull grey colour, much like pewter or zinc, whereas a proper, electrically sound joint remains shiny and mirror-like. One way to pick out the baddies is with your Anglepoise light – if you arrange the light to shine down onto the scratchplate, good joints will catch the light and reflect it back, while dry joints which remain dull and won’t reflect much at all. This light method is a very helpful way to sniff out a problem, but testing the joint is best left to a multimeter.

MULTIMETERS

Maybe you can get by without one of these gizmos, but even a simple multimeter can be very useful – and some work, on humbucking pickups for example, is pretty much impossible without one. Two kinds of multimeter are available: the old AVO-style analogue needle-type meters and the newer digital LCD readout type. I find that the needle-type is easier to read, while the digital types can only be read if you can look down on them.

Next month we’ll complete this guide with a brief explanation of the whys and wherefores of choosing and using multimeters. We’ll also put forward some examples of how you can deal with the problems that old and rusty hardware can present.

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Keep It Clean

Are you suffering from gunk? This month we're lifting the lid on one of the shameful secrets of the guitar world, fingerboard hygiene.

Take a look at the fingerboard on your instrument. Can you see a row of six elliptical mounds of grime between the frets? Tish, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. What on earth produced this muck? Well, you, basically. No matter how clean you think your hands are, grease and sweat from those digits will leap onto the strings, deteriorating the wraps, and will eventually be compressed onto the surface of the fingerboard. Of course there can be additional contributing factors, namely beer, nicotine, sandwiches...

The resultant effects of dirty strings are all too familiar: dull notes, poor intonation and that general 'my-strings-are-cheesewire' feeling. But before abandoning your playing to set up as a free cutting service for Monsieur Camembert's Cave du Fromage, take heart: this can be avoided (or at least reduced). Set aside a one-off hour-long session to clean your fingerboard, and get into the habit of preventative measures.

But first things first. Remove all the strings and throw them away. On guitars with fulcrum vibratos (Fender vintage, unrecessed Floyd Rose, Wilkinson, etc) place some thick card, a few business cards or plastic credit cards (expired only), or the vibrato's backplate under the back of the vibrato – this will stop it being pulled back by the springs when you remove the strings.

The fingerboard

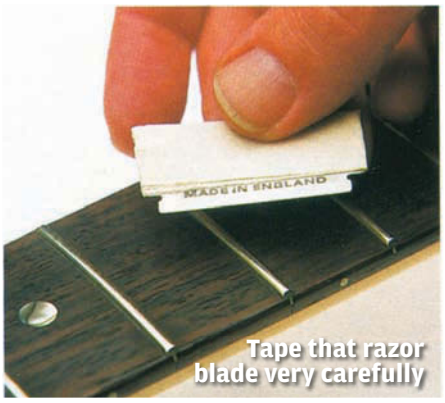
The most common types of timbers used for fingerboards are rosewood, maple and ebony. The rosewood and ebony boards are usually 'unfinished' (although a light oil can be applied for some moisture protection and to enhance the look and condition of the wood) while the near-white maple is typically more heavily protected by a clear or tinted finish.

Finished fingerboards

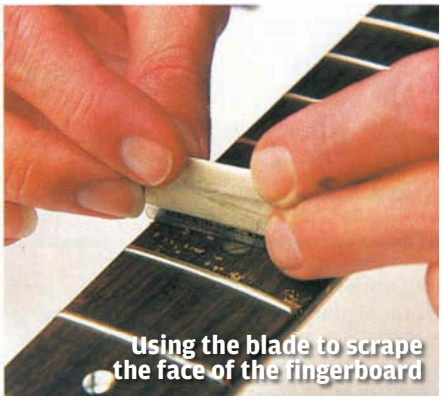
As you may expect, there are different methods of cleaning the different types, so let's start with the finished fingerboard, which is usually made of maple. You may have read articles or books encouraging you to use soap and water to clean the grime which collects between frets. I've witnessed the effects of water on wood and modern finishes – it's not advised. White spirit applied with a soft rag is much safer, as it dissolves grease and softens dirt with no danger of damaging the fingerboard or finish. Ball up the cloth into a small pad and dip it into the white spirit. Using small circular motions, you should find that all the dirt lifts straight off the lacquer. The most difficult area to clean will be on the very edges of the frets. A cocktail stick with a piece of cloth on the end will get into the tightest of corners.

There's a good chance that, if the fingerboard is dirty, the frets will be tarnished. You can kill two birds with one stone at this point, as both the frets and the fingerboard can be polished in one hit, with Brasso. This product is not like other liquid abrasives; its cutting abilities are aided by ammonia, which makes it perfect for polishing metals and modern plastic finishes. Apply the Brasso onto a soft cloth and rub the entire top surface of the fingerboard – in line with the frets, not along the length of the neck. Obviously, the

Rosewood (top) and maple fingerboards



Tape that razor blade very carefully

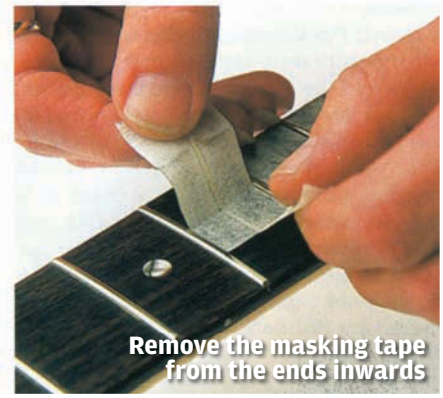

Using the blade to scrape the face of the fingerboard

Taping up the board with masking tape

Follow these instructions and you'll have a neck which looks like a million dollars – even better, the chances are, than when the guitar was made

Polishing frets with wet and dry

Final polish with OOOO steel wool


Remove the masking tape from the ends inwards

Final buffing with fingerboard oil

harder you rub, the shinier your frets will be. Always finish off with a quick wipe from a clean cloth. When you are satisfied with your efforts, restring and set up the instrument.

Unfinished fingerboards

Working on these is a little more involved. To achieve that 'factory look' on your frets and fingerboard, you may need to go shopping first. You'll need...

- Masking tape (insulation tape is not the same thing)
- 600 and 1200 grit wet and dry paper
- A straight razor blade (double or single-edged type)
- OOOO wire wool (that's very fine)
- A small bottle of fingerboard oil

With the exception of the oil, you'll get all of this at a high-street auto store. Single-edged backed razor blades should be available from an automotive paint supplier. If you can't get those, standard double-edged blades are fine, although you must wrap sufficient masking tape around one edge. This is not only a safety precaution: it allows you to identify the edge that was last used. The double-edged blade will feel more flexible and may well be more suitable for beginners trying this method for the first time. As to the fingerboard oil, we recommend Manson's Fingerboard Oil, a lemon oil-based preparation which works very well, and the small bottle will last a very, very long time. Alternately look for almond oil (in the ingredients section of your supermarket).

On this type of fingerboard, you should take the precaution of taping up the areas of the guitar which could be marked in some way. The headstock, pickups, and the portion of the body around the neck joint are favourite targets for over-enthusiastic polishing.

Now take the razor blade in hand; the idea is to use it as a miniature scraper. But first, a word of warning: some guitar manufacturers would have you believe that your fingerboard really is either rosewood or ebony. Imagine that sinking feeling as you scrape off a top layer of coloured dye to reveal a very much lighter coloured wood underneath. If you're not sure whether your board is pukka, always get a second opinion. Alternatively, scrape a little right behind the highest fret, rather than anywhere more important, to see if the colour changes dramatically.

Take the blade between the thumb and forefinger of both hands, and hold it at roughly 80 degrees to the fingerboard surface. Remember, as you scrape back and forth between the frets (*with* the grain), you are merely trying to remove the dirt from the fingerboard. It doesn't take a genius to realise that there is a risk of scalloping the board if you don't think about what you're doing. I'll repeat that: *think about what you are doing.* Don't worry if the fingerboard has any inlays of pearl or some other material. So long as the blade is sharp, it will deal with them.

By now, you may be horrified at what you've just done. Don't panic. All those wood 'shavings' will soon be a vague memory. Take the OOOO wire wool and rub furiously along the length of the fingerboard, frets included. I know what you're thinking, trust me.

At this point, the wire wool will have cleaned away any shavings and debris which may have been compacted along the length of the frets. You will also be aware that the frets now have a matte finish, thanks to tens of thousands of tiny scratches.

Wipe the board down with a clean cloth. It will make you feel better. Take the masking tape and, very carefully, mask the fingerboard so that only the frets are showing. This will mean that once you get as far as the 8th or 9th fret, you will have to start cutting the tape in half in order to keep things neat.

Using an old pair of scissors, or the edge of a work surface if you're feeling flash, cut two or three 50mm squares of 600 grit wet and dry paper. This will be plenty. Wrap the square around your finger and rub along the length of each and every fret. Only move onto the next fret when all of the scratches left by the wire wool have disappeared.

Fingers sore? I have news for you. Do exactly the same thing now with the 1200 wet and dry. Don't cheat yourself. If you have knowingly left scratches, you will feel them later when you bend strings.

Now it's time to get the wire wool out again. The fine OOOO grade will remove any traces of the 1200 grit wet and dry paper, and will leave the frets looking like chrome, and you will probably feel quite pleased with yourself. It's crucial, however, that you don't get too carried away. The next part, although extremely straightforward, needs patience.

The masking tape must now be removed, but you have to lift the two ends towards the centre. This method prevents the lacquer on the edge of the fingerboard from chipping off.

The worst is now over. Wash your hands and find a clean, soft cloth. Put a few drops of the fingerboard oil onto the cloth, and wipe well into the grain of the fingerboard. Turn the cloth over and buff the whole neck. It's important to remove the excess oil as, although it protects the fingerboard, it can actually cause the strings to deteriorate. Wait half an hour or so for the area to dry, give it a final buff with an oil-free cloth, and re-string.

Follow these instructions and you'll have a neck which looks like a million dollars. The chances are that it's better now than it was when the guitar was made, as most manufacturers cannot afford the time for such luxuries. So what can you do to keep it looking that way? Regular maintenance is the key. Keep a small towel or cloth in your case or gigbag so that you can give your hands a wipe before, and the strings a wipe after you've played. Fastfret and other cleaning and lubrication products are fine – but keep it clean in the first place and you'll find your strings last longer. Keep it clean, and clean it often... you know it makes sense.

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Israeli Gears

Mad scales, blurry fingers, blood-flecked scratchplates – these assorted joys (and more) can be yours once you've dug the first of our off-the-eclectic-scale klezmer workshops

This month we're going to look at a traditional Eastern European Jewish music called klezmer. It's a style which positively drips with influences – Russian, Polish, Bulgarian and Gypsy to name but a few. It can be fast and frenetic, but it's always fun and exciting to play. It's also one of those rare forms of music where both the rhythm playing and the soloing are really exceptionally challenging.

Klei Zemer ('musical instruments') are the Hebrew/Yiddish words which give klezmer its name. Traditionally, klezmer uses violin, clarinet, trumpet, accordion and hackbrett (aka dulcimer) but in recent times guitar, banjo and upright bass have been added, much in the style of Eastern European Gypsy music. As the lucky guitarist, the chances are that you'll get to do a lot of percussive rhythm playing a la Django Reinhardt's Hot Club Quintet, as well as some soulful soloing.

In this article we're going to be looking at the melodic aspect of klezmer which involves some exotic and unusual scales from far-off lands and cultures. As well as garden-variety scales such as the major, mixolydian and natural minor, klezmer melodies make good use of the harmonic minor scale and its modes. Try experimenting with these scales. They're perfect for world music, too. A good way of getting hold of the sound is to hold a drone on a synth and improvise in free-time over the drone.

Next issue we'll be looking at the very energetic and high energy rhythm side of klezmer guitar playing, so grab yourself a bottle of kosher wine (strong and sweet), shake those wrists until they're nice and loose and get ready to party...

1 HARMONIC MINOR SCALE IN THE KEY OF G

4/4 TIME

2 AHAVA RABA

4/4 TIME

Exercise 2 is an example of the harmonic minor's most popular mode, this time in D. It's called the Ahava Raba, or Freygish. Ahava Raba are the first words of a well-known prayer which uses this mode and actually means *Whole Lotta Love* (that's right – Led Schlepplin). This mode is achieved by playing the harmonic minor from its fifth degree, giving us a dominant seventh scale with a flattened ninth and a flattened thirteenth. This could be called the phrygian mode with a major third – probably where the word Freygish comes from – but it's most often called the phrygian major or phrygian dominant. It's used all over the Arab world (where it is called Hijaz) and in India (where it is called Bhairav). So many names... and it's also one of Yngwie Malmsteen's favourite modes.

3 HAVA NAGILAH — 4/4 TIME

Exercise 3 is a section from a famous Hebrew song, *Hava Nagilah*, which is based on this mode. First, have a go at learning the melody; then try to use the mode to solo over the chords. As soon as you hear the semi-tone jump that goes from D to Eb (the chords D7 to Eb major), and then the jump to the F#, you'll instantly have the flavour of the style. Oh, and when it comes to the tempo, the general idea is to start off really slow and then get progressively faster and faster until your fingers explode.

4 KLEZMER PHRASES — 4/4 TIME

Exercise 4 has a couple of phrases that are typical of the approach within klezmer. It's all about melody. Try to put these over the chord sequence from Exercise 3, and it should all start to happen. Also, feel free to experiment with the tempos as much as you want.

5 EXOTIC HARMONIC MINOR SCALE — 4/4 TIME

Exercise 5 highlights a version of this mode where the seventh degree is altered to a natural seventh to make things even more exotic. This gives us another version of the *Ahava Raba*, and is actually the mode built from the fifth degree of the Hungarian minor – a harmonic minor scale with a sharpened fourth. It may sound familiar; Dick Dale made it famous with a tune used in *Pulp Fiction*, an adaptation of an old folk tune called *Miserlou*. Though this scale has a natural seventh degree, it still feels like a dominant scale and works over a D7 chord. The major seventh almost starts to sound like a blue note – the klezmer version, if you like, of the flattened fifth.

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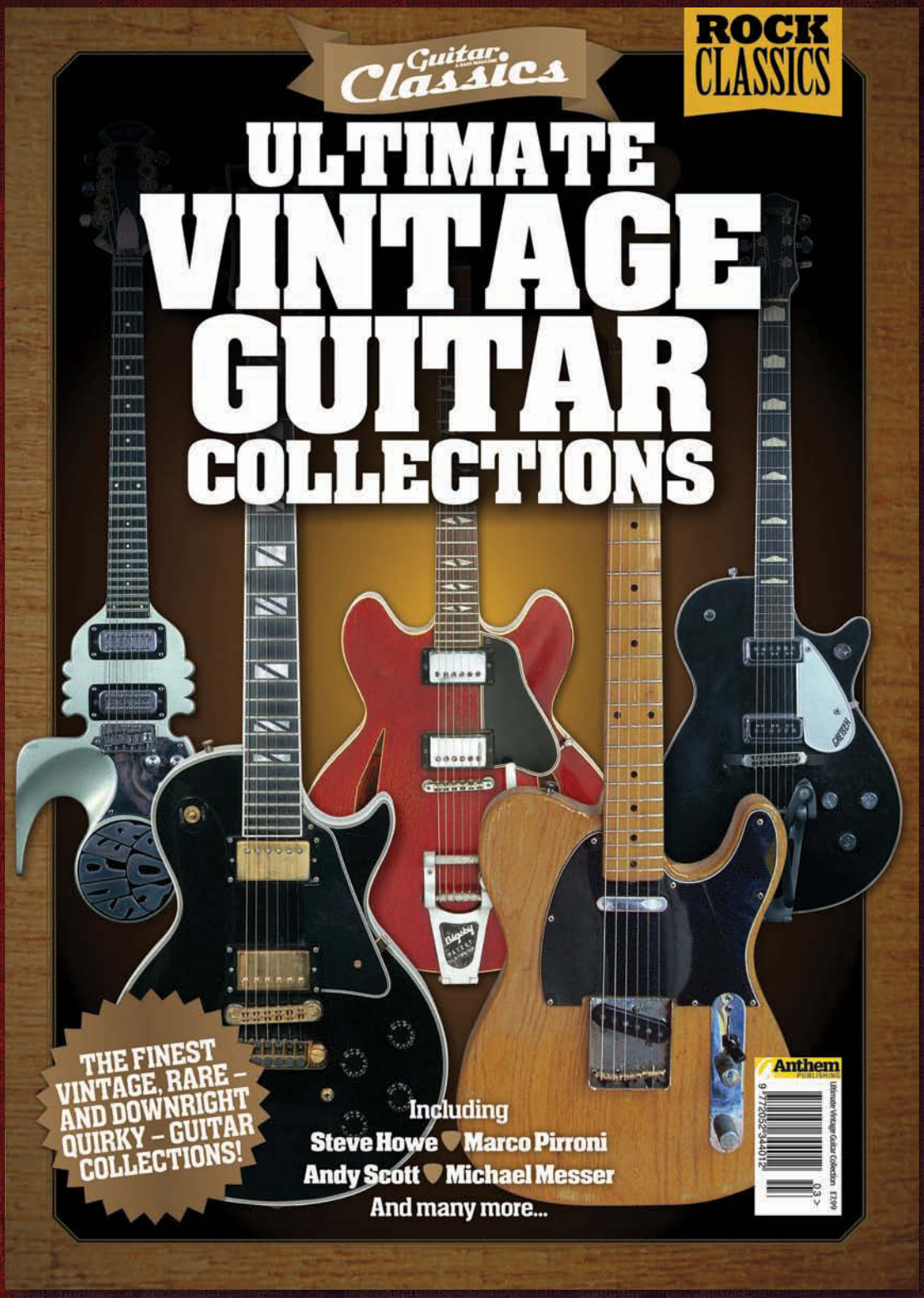

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Texas Style Blues

Time to get in line for some basic blues rhythm techniques, courtesy of Stevie Ray Vaughan

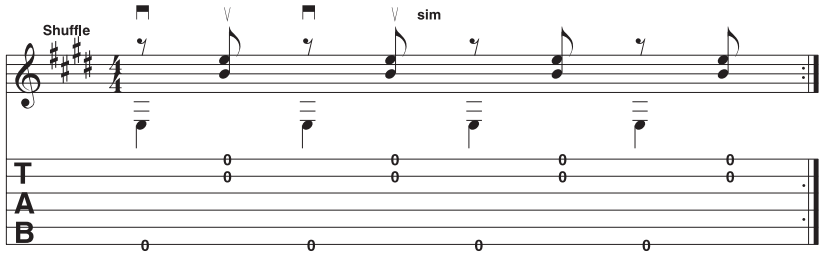
It's time to learn a blues rhythm guitar technique, similar to the one used by Stevie Ray Vaughan in *Pride And Joy* from *Texas Flood* (1983). It basically consists of a walking bass part on the bass strings punctuated by short open string stabs on the upper top two strings.

All the exercises are marked to be played in the shuffle rhythm – that is, instead of playing in even quavers, the first quaver of each beat is lengthened and the second quaver is correspondingly shortened – roughly equivalent to a triplet, with the first two of the three quavers in a triplet tied together. A shuffle feel can vary from barely perceptible through to a lazy feel or a sharp, clipped feel, depending on the desired effect. For practice, try varying the degree of the shuffle feel in the following exercises from subtle through to severe. So off we go with a killer Stevie Ray-style riff...

1 CORRECT PLECTRUM TECHNIQUE

4/4 TIME

This first exercise is played solely on open strings in order to isolate the plectrum technique required to play the part. The plectrum strokes indicated above the notes in the music mean a downstroke on the beat and an upstroke half way through the beat – the 'sim' indication is short for simile, which means continue in a similar manner; that is, continue with the alternate strumming pattern. To emphasise the desired effect, the exercise is written in two parts or voices – the bass part with the downward pointing note stems and the upper chordal part with the upward pointing note stems.

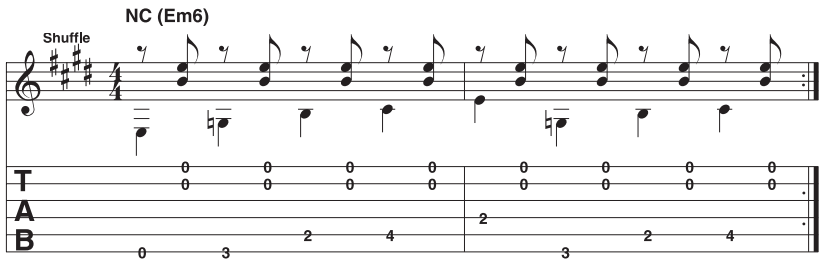


The bass note is played on the beat, followed by the top two open strings on the upbeat, then another bass note on the next beat. When this second bass note is played, the top two strings are to be stopped dead at the same time, as the bass note is struck by sticking the palm of the plectrum hand back onto the strings. This requires a slightly different hand position from normal – closer to the bridge so that the palm can stop the top two strings without touching the bottom three strings. This is tricky, so practice very slowly at first. The end result is well worthwhile, but some degree of patience is required... as well as persistence.

2 WALKING BASS PATTERN

4/4 TIME

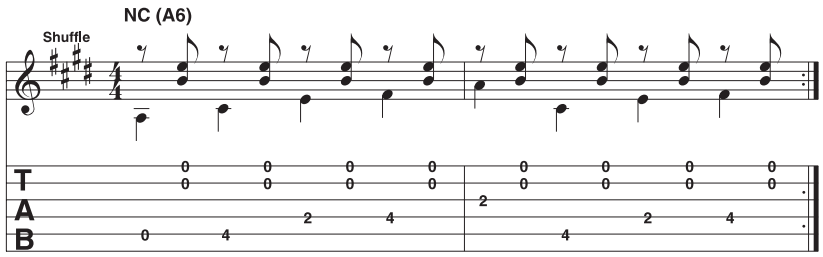
Let's apply the technique in Exercise 1 to a two-bar walking bass pattern in the key of E. Firstly, play the bass part on its own, then add the chordal stabs on the top two strings. Make sure the bass notes last for a full beat, giving a continuous bassline with no gaps – don't lift the finger from the bass note at the same time as you stop the top two strings. The walking bass line implies an Em6 chord, hence the Em6 in brackets.



3 IV CHORD RIFFS

4/4 TIME

A similar riff to that in Exercise 2, this riff corresponds to what would be chord IV in the key of E, and the walking bass line implies an A6 chord, hence the A6 in brackets. As in Exercise 2, first of all play the bass part on its own. The tricky part when putting both parts together is that the bass part moves onto the third string at the beginning of the second bar. This entails stopping the top two strings at the same time as striking the third string at the second fret – precise positioning of the strumming hand is required. Of course, this could be refingered so the bass notes remain on the bottom string, but since the whole point of *Boot Camp* is to develop technique, try it the way it's written!



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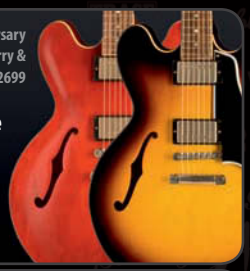

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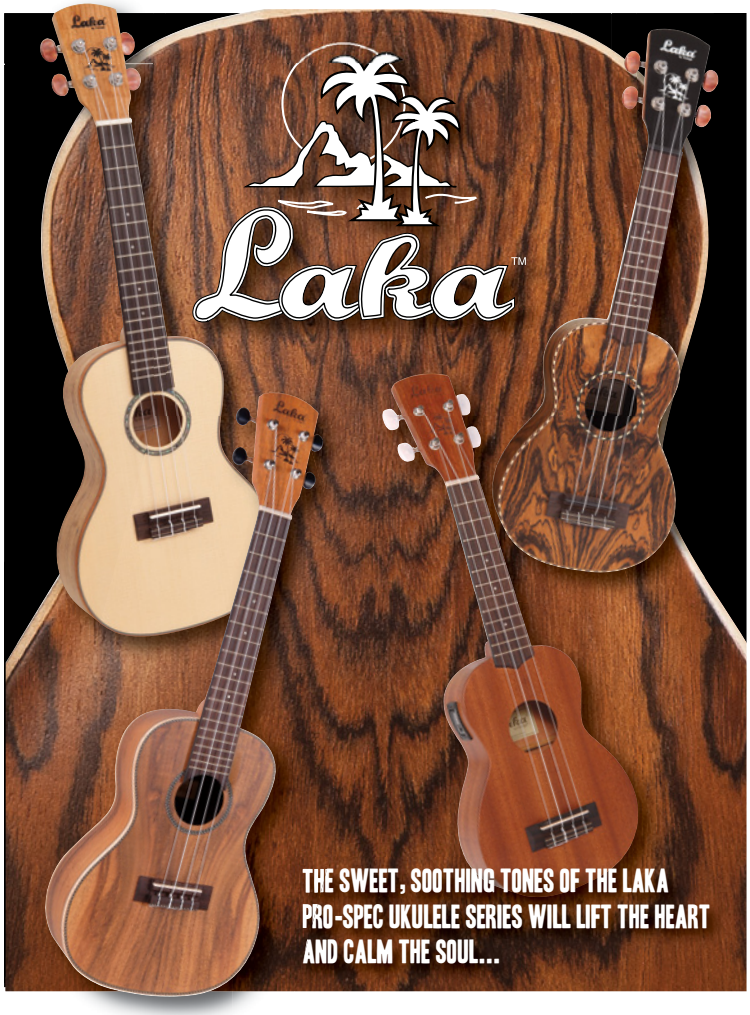

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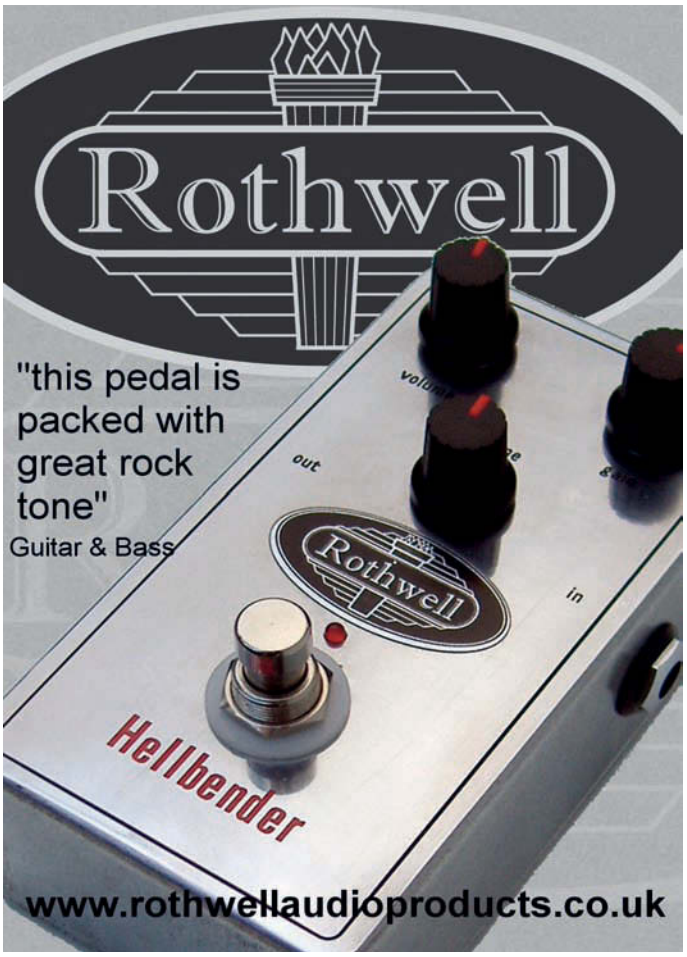

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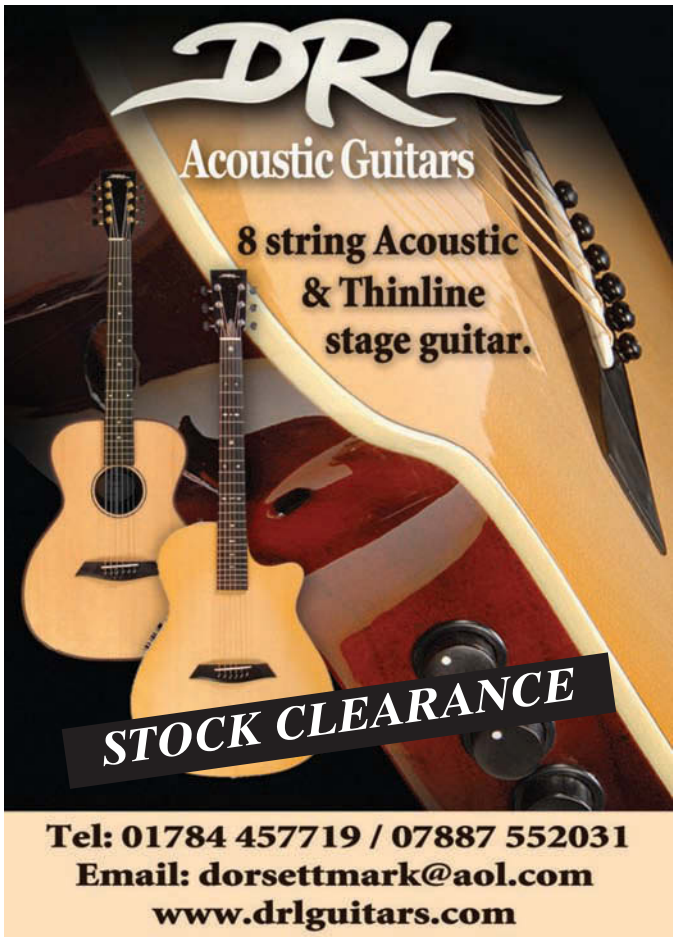

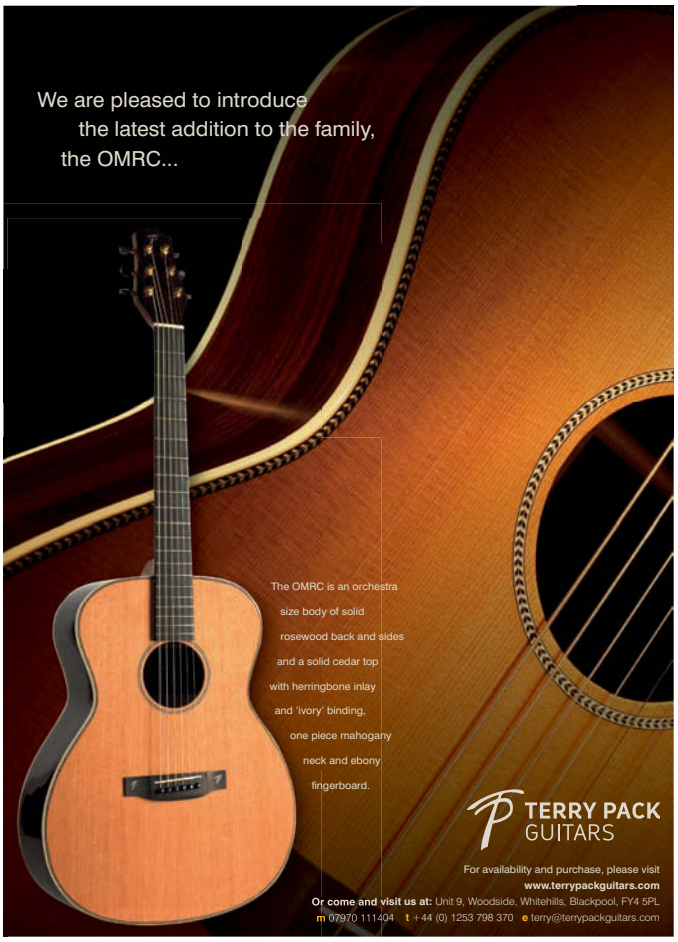

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Dean V79 Flying V, tobacco sunburst, zebra humbuckers, Grover tuners, cream binding, mahogany neck/body, abalone dotes, v-plate, fitted case, as new, £270. Tel: Paul 07963 1297733, south London

Gibson LP Standard 2005, honeyburst with cool flame top, nice weight chrome hardware, immaculate condition, Gibson case, £1495. Tel: 01386 861873

Vintage '70s Rickenbacker 4001, red, excellent condition, includes original case and extras. Please email for stunning pictures, £2000 ono. Tel: 07984450990 or email jen986@hotmail.com, Beds

65 Amps Tupelo combo, handwired all-valve combo with tremolo, footswitch, totally mint condition, £1200. Tel: 0114 2556185, Sheffield area

Gibson Firebird V Reverse, 1991, first proper reissue, sunburst, unmarked, pristine, ungigged condition, plush case and original papers and tags. Real head turner, superb tone, £1100 ono. Tel 07786 474157, Midlands

Hiwatt Maxwatt G100 112R combo, great condition, comes with Hiwatt footswitch, £250. Tel: 07999 068616, NE Lincs

Fender Vibro Champ XD, 5W valve amp with 16 effects and 16 amp sounds, as new, £100. Tel: 01255 435967, Essex

Mesa/Boogie 5.50 Express 2x12" combo, with cover. Very good condition. £850 ono. Tel: 01733 897022, Cambs.

PRS SE Singlecut, with trem and Irongear full-range single coils (original pickups are included), gig bag, £300. Tel: 01260 272417, East Cheshire

Guitar mags, Guitar & Bass, Guitarist plus others, About 300, £70 the lot, buyer collects. Tel: 07824 678134, Suffolk.

Epiphone Ultra 339, mint condition, £375. Ashdown Bass Sub Octave Plus pedal, £40. JSH GM55 'Elvis' mic, £25. Tel: 07710 147395, Beds

Taylor 314ce, 2005, excellent condition, nicely matured tone, great guitar with no issues. Original hard case. Photos available, £850. Tel: Mike 07799 640523 or email mjshaw@btinternet.com, Sussex

Squier Tom Delonge Strat, white, vgc, home use only, gig bag, strap and lead, £125. Tel: 07714 300554 or email alexanderzz@blueyonder.co.uk

Hiwatt 200 Hylight amp head, ex-Noddy Holder of Slade, 4xKT88 valves version, amp tech recommends caps replaced for regular gigging, hence £1500. Tel: 07810526369 or email StuR@hotmail.co.uk

Marshall DSL 50W head, £350 ono. Marshall Vintage Modern 50W head, £350 ono. Marshall 4x12" cab, greenbacks, £250 ono. Tel: 01935 850395, Somerset

Gibson Les Paul Junior, brown tobacco sunburst, few marks, gig bag, £425. Tel: 07753 277862, Berks

Fender Stratocaster, '50s Classic Player, sunburst, mint as new condition in Gator case, pro action, plays and sounds superb. Bargain, poss p/x, £450. Tel: 07909 189247, Lancs

Boss RC-300 triple stereo looper pedal. New and unused, still boxed. Check online at Creative Looping for details. Retails £429, must sell hence £379. Tel: John 01264 364740, Andover (eves)

Blackstar Artisan 30W combo, several scratches to tolex as gigged for several years but in good condition, £650 ono. Tel: Innes 07818 052708 or email isibun@hotmail.com, Bath

Fender Strat, ivory, rosewood neck, vgc, never gigged, Fender case, serial no. N6190732, top spec, £800 ono. Epiphone Les Paul, blueburst, block inlays, all-bound rosewood neck, serial no: U03121938, S Korea, £350 ono. Squier Strat, maple neck, SNCY04019044, black white S/P £150. Fender Strat Standard Series, 1983, serial no. E323870, sunburst, maple neck, two-knob version, Freeflyte tremolo, £850. Tel: 01298 74208 after 6pm, Derbyshire

Fender Custom Shop Relic Strat, rosewood board, big frets, looks and plays great, vintage case and all candy, c.o.a., £1850. Tel: 01255 435967, Essex

1970s S copy guitar with Seymour Duncan pickups, beautiful rosewood fretboard, maker's name faded on headstock, phone for more details, bargain buy, £200. Tel: Gordon 01643 703593, Somerset

Fender Stratocaster Anniversary 1979, one of first 500 in rare pearl white, £1800. Fender Stratocaster 1983 two-knob, black with maple neck, E3 Serial, £700. Tel: 07985 632282 for pictures

Organic Standard guitar, hand made in the UK, perfect condition, no scratches or chips, natural wood oil finish, Includes original hard case, £1100 ono. Tel: 07527 428489, Bristol

Taylor 614CE, blue, 2002 model, excellent condition for year, Taylor case and tools. Collection only, £1650. Tel: 07855 059416, W.Yorks

Gibson Custom Shop CS336, semi-hollow, figured maple top, antique sunburst, immaculate condition, hardly played, complete with case and certificate, £1895. Tel: 01424 774389 or email andy@agl.me.uk for photos, East Sussex

Line 6 Vetta 2x12" 100W modelling amp. Top of the range Line 6, mint condition, home use only. Comes with made to measure padded cover. £395. Tel: 01322 310477, Kent

Fender Champ 1961 tweed amplifier. Mint/museum super clean condition – one previous USA lady owner from new. Superb guitar or harmonica tone, £2250 ono. Tel: 07900 484400

Fender US vintage reissue '52 Telecaster, butterscotch, 2004, excellent condition, Fender tweed case, home use only, £995. Tel: Glenn 07463 735107 or e-mail glenn.b.robinson@btopenworld.com

Early 1970s Orange OR120 head with 4x12" 120W cab, £900 ono. Fender Jazz, USA-made, 1998, sunburst, rosewood fingerboard, in Gator case, £750. Tel: 0777 327 6815, Lancs

Fender American Standard Telecaster, 2012, sunburst, maple neck, home use only, pro set-up, excellent condition, Fender hard case, £750. Tel: 07932 279021/01924 467284, West Yorks

Fender Hotrod Deluxe III, unused, sat in the house just out of the box, ungigged, sledge hammer to crack a nut hence sale, £595 ono. Tel: Tony 01442 876740, Herts

Vintage Paradise (LP style), year old. Tokai Love Rock, 8 months old. Both with new strings, £180 each ono. Tel: 01277 658670, Essex

Gibson BB King Lucille Custom Edition, ebony, Heritage certificate, bought new, always cased, unplayed, pristine, £1800. Swap acoustic, cash either way. Tel: Jon 01229 871880, Cumbria

Hagstrom jazz guitar designed by James D'Aquisto, mint condition, including case and stand. Collection only, £1100 ono. Tel: 07402 929993, Crewe

Fender Strat, home made, lovely neck & sunburst body, Mexican hardware, Fender bag, cost £300 to build, £150 ono, collect only. Tel: 01298 74208 after 6pm, Derbyshire

Gibson SG Standard, cherry, 2008, immaculate condition – hardly played from new, Gibson hard case, £795. Glenn 07463 735107 or e-mail glenn.b.robinson@btopenworld.com

Satellite 65T short-scale guitar, call for details and offers. Yamaha Pacifica, natural, £85. Dean steel resonator, £325 ono. Tel: 01225 862255, Bath area

Marshall Class 5 combo, mint condition, British made, home use only, 1W or 5W setting, £225. Collect only. Tel: 01733 849546, Cambridgeshire

Gibson Chet Atkins Country Gent, 1998, wine red, gold hardware, Bigsby, lined hard case, stunning rare guitar, £1850 ono. Tel: Steve 01246 280299, Chesterfield

Fender Precision Nate Mendel bass guitar with slim neck and Seymour Duncan pickups, as new condition. Comes with Hiscox hard case. Tel: Chas 01622 754648, Kent area

Fender Blues Deville vintage reissue 4x10" tweed amplifier, twin channels, 60W RMS, custom luxury cover, superb condition, works perfectly, £500. Tel: John 01264 364740, Andover (eves)

Lazy J Cruiser pedal, clean boost and overdrive, excellent condition, hardly used, £175. Tel: 0114 2556185, Sheffield area

Fender Stratocaster three-ply tortoiseshell scratchplate, pre-wired with 3 Seymour Duncan stacked STK-S1 single coil-sized white covered humbuckers and controls, £85. Tel: Colin 07732 947131, Epsom

Gibson Les Paul Studio, early model, faded polaris white with dot board, DiMarzios fitted, £580. 1998 Flying V 40th Anniversary (not 58 replica), mahogany with gold hardware, £1100. Tel: 0777 327 6815

Fender Clapton Stratocaster 1990 in rare candy apple green, owned from new. Tweed case, all original tags and candy. Possible p/ex or £850 ono. Tel: Brian 07904 184047

Guitar & Bass Mags, 2007/8/9. Free, collect only. Call Chris 07545 330053 Northampton, email: cjbtrek@btinternet.com.

Luna Henna Paisley S STE S type guitar, maple fretboard, mahogany body, single-coil pickups, Grover tuners, with gig bag, costs over £400 new. Bargain at £120. Tel: Gordon 01643 703593

Yamaha SA700, two for sale, Japanese-made early 1980s ES-335 clone, both excellent condition, cherry £675, blonde £695. Tel: John 01992 523138 or email johnblackman@ntlworld.com, Essex

Gibson Les Paul Custom, alpine white, right-handed guitar, 2012, hardly used, genuine reason for sale, £2200 ono. Tel: Nigel 07928 256305 or email nige142@hotmail.co.uk

Spector/Kramer NS-2 bass, 1987 USA handmade, amber, flame maple, EMGs, Hazlab preamp, crown inlays, ohsc, near mint condition, £1950. Tel: 01483 751929, Surrey

Epiphone Broadway, 1997, archtop guitar, natural finish, excellent condition, made at Peerless plant Korea, pro setup, ohc, £450. Tel: Nigel 07801 324687 or email ng.hall@virgin.net for photos and details, North Oxfordshire

Marshall JCM900 4502 2x12" 50W combo, hi gain, dual reverb, footswitch, cover, excellent condition, home use only, £425. Tel: Glenn 07463 735107 e-mail glenn.b.robinson@btopenworld.com

WANTED

Yamaha SG200 in pearl white. Tel/txt: 07710 161598 or email Chris-r1968@hotmail.co.uk

Brown-haired bassist wanted for hard rock band. Long hair, over 22. Email: Gismus@aol.com

Egnator Rebel 30 combo and Roland-ready Strat, Mexican, white, must be good working condition, preferably London. Tel: Mick 020 8530 1208

Fender Tweed '50s Champ or Princeton or Deluxe amp, must be original. Tel: 0151 638 9567, Cheshire area

Gibson 2008 50th Anniversary Explorer DSX50 brimstone burst, excellent to mint with case. Also wanted: original hard case for Gibson Gothic Explorer. Tel: Tony 01535 606002 or e-mail info@telluris.info

Gibson Howard Roberts oval hole guitar, top cash for right guitar. Tel George, 01566 775617, Cornwall

Pickguard with integral pickup for '60s Rosetti or Egmond Lucky Seven, any condition. Tel: John 07977 203234 or 01706 377174, Lancs

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Soundtrack of my life

Matt Schofield

Classic blues albums hog the bulk of the British guitarist's turntable time but vintage soul, jazz and rock platters are welcome guests

Photo: Sam Hare

One of the brightest guitar talents to emerge in the UK in recent years, Matt Schofield is going global. Now being lauded from all quarters far and wide for his intelligent, consummate fretwork, he has charmed the US and all remaining resistance is now crumbling. Born in 1977, the young prodigy became a pro sideman at the age of 18, backing up harp player Lee Sankey and then British blues diva Dana Gillespie before releasing his own debut, *Siftin' Thru Ashes*, in 2005. On his subsequent three records he has effortlessly conquered New Orleans funk and soul; for a time it seemed as though he might take a sidewards step into jazz, but his latest album *Far As I Can See* confirms his devotion to funky blues. With his mastery over the guitar at its zenith and his songwriting blossoming, Schofield's time is now.

Albert King

BORN UNDER A BAD SIGN

To me Albert is the one who carved the ten commandments of blues guitar in stone for eternity. I've listened to him nearly every day since I was 12 years old, and despite his apparent simplicity I still continue to get deeper into his playing all the time. The title track might actually be the perfect blues song.

BB King

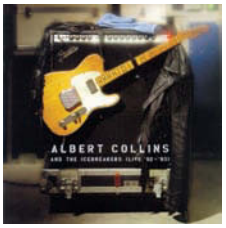
LIVE AT THE REGAL

This is a masterclass on how to make a live album. Swinging band, classic songs, a wild crowd and the undisputed King of The Blues just burning through it all. Tone, touch, phrasing... and what a vocal! Check out his intro to *Worry, Worry* for the original lesson on how to build a slow blues solo. The definition of 'legend'.

Albert Collins

LIVE '92-'93

This live set captures everything I love about Albert's music... passion, energy and enthusiasm. When I think of Mr Collins I think of the funky, fun, positive side of the blues. He's unique in his approach, and listening to him just makes me smile. He was a one-off. This world won't hear anything like it again.



Jimi Hendrix

ELECTRIC LADYLAND

The analogy I've often used for Jimi is that he managed to break the glass box that guitar playing was contained in up until that point. Nobody else even saw the box around them. Nowhere is this complete redefining of guitar music more evident than on here. A genre-busting magnum opus.

Vaughan Brothers

FAMILY STYLE

I'm cheating a bit here, but I need to include both Stevie Ray and Jimmie on this list. They're like yin and yang for me. There's something incredibly poignant about this being Stevie's last work. They both managed, with their own very different approaches, to define very essence of modern Texas blues guitar.

Robben Ford

HANDFUL OF BLUES

Hearing Robben Ford was a game-changer for me. I'd been on a strict diet of traditional blues and then, wow – what are all these *other* notes this guy has? He has an incredible melodic vocabulary, and this is the definitive modern progressive blues record. He opened up my ears to all the possibilities.

Oscar Peterson

NIGHT TRAIN

If I had to pick the greatest soloist of all time, on any instrument, then Peterson would be it. He's by far my biggest non-guitar playing influence. Every night I try and play guitar like Oscar played piano. An endless stream of improvisational ideas, flawlessly executed. Devastating... and nobody swings harder.

Donny Hathaway

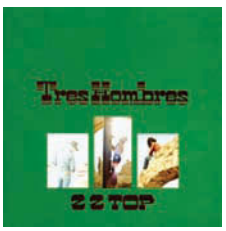
LIVE

When I grow up I want to be able to sing like Donny Hathaway! The best way to compliment this record is to say that when I don't know what to listen to, I put this on – it's always perfect! The band is just killing... Willie Weeks' bass solo on *Everything is Everything* became the prototype for every (slap-less) bass solo taken ever since.

ZZ Top

TRES HOMBRES

My favourite 'band', and Gibbons is the biggest influence that nobody seems to know I have! Tone and more TONE! It's almost enough to make me go and get a Les Paul and Marshall and call it done. You need vinyl or a good remaster, as they ruined the early ZZ Top LPs on CD for a while. All hail the Reverend Willie G!



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